

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SUMMER 1985 · £1.45 · \$3.50



German Cinema: How to Become American

Alan Yentob on the Arts and the BBC

**Rosenbaum distrusts criticism/Wajda prefers Spielberg/
Hurd Hatfield restores houses...**

For SUMMER/AUTUMN Release



DEBORAH KERR
MADHUR JAFFREY
in

The Assam Garden

Dir: MARY McMURRAY

GERARD DARMON
MUSE DALBRAY
in

LES PRINCES

Dir: TONI GATLIF

TAORMINA FILM FESTIVAL '84 · GRAND PRIX



GLORIA SWANSON
in
the lost masterpiece

QUEEN KELLY

Dir: ERICH VON STROHEIM

BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL '85

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On the cover:
 Peter Greenaway's new film
 'Zed and Two Noughts'.
 Photo: Luke Kelly.

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Multiplex and Metro

Ten screens and old-fashioned luxury

British Film Year, which was launched in May, is designed to get more people to go to cinemas. The 'multiplex' idea, clusters of cinemas in accessible places, is one of the things credited with keeping audiences going in the United States, both because it allows a lot of choice within a single building and because the new cinemas are more attractive places than the old ones. In October, with the opening of a 10-cinema complex at Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, we shall have the chance to see whether the idea works in Britain.

With seating for more than 2,000, the Milton Keynes multiplex will be Britain's largest movie venue. Each auditorium will hold between 180 and 250. The Odeon Leicester Square, for comparison, seats 1,980, the old Hammersmith Odeon, now given over to rock concerts, 3,480. One reason that Milton Keynes was selected for the site of the multiplex was that it had no existing cinema of its own; the nearest was an 880-seater at Bletchley. The multiplex will be part of a £7.5m pyramid-shaped entertainment complex, The Point, next to a shopping centre which will also house restaurants, a night club and bingo hall.

The project, initiated by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, is a co-venture of Bass Leisure and American Multi-Cinema. The latter is now the third largest us exhibitor; it has been developing the multi-screen idea for 20 years and on its home ground now owns 800 screens in 160 complexes. It is keen to find other British sites. Due to misconceived twinings and triplings in the early 70s, multi-cinemas have up to now had a fairly bad press in Britain. The new cinemas, however, have 'computerised sightlines'. The miniature screen has been banished. There will be two or more shows an evening, few adverts and a minimum of delays. Smoking will be prohibited and an extra attraction will be popcorn imported from the United States and 'popped' on the spot.

The Point, it is argued, will bear no relation to the insalubrious, hard-to-reach downtown cinema. It aims to draw from a catchment area with a 15-mile radius; and 1.5 million people are reckoned to be within a 45-minute car drive. Programme policy will be 'flexible', with specialised and foreign-language films not excluded. At least one of the ten



The Other Cinema's Tony Kirkhope (centre) outside the new Metro with the GLC's Peter Pitt and Ken Little.

cinemas will have a U-rated attraction.

One print can be shown on up to four screens, though how this might affect the range of choice with the release of the latest exploits of Indiana Jones or the likes of the Beverly Hills Cop remains to be seen. (A *Sunday Times* feature, pegged to the Milton Keynes announcement, included a despatch from San Diego, where a perhaps not wholly typical family group arrived at the local AMC complex and duly went their several ways, husband taking children to *Care Bears*, wife and her mother selecting *Amadeus*, and grandpa going by himself to *The Killing Fields*.)

The AMC-Bass combination is not alone in aiming to revitalise British cinema-going via the multiplex concept. Thorn EMI is in 'active negotiation' for several potential sites at conurbations in various parts of Britain, and hopes to open at least one multi-cinema by the end of next year. An announcement is expected in the summer.

Meanwhile, back in London, the art houses have been the (relatively) bullish sector of exhibition, not just in the more fashionable inner suburbs but in the West End itself, with the Lumiere recently joined by the Shaftesbury Avenue Curzon. September will see the opening of a new two-screen specialist cinema, the Metro, somewhat improbably housed in the tourist-slanted Trocadero centre at the foot of Shaftesbury Avenue—though entrance will be gained from Rupert Street rather than from within the 'Troc' itself.

The Metro, which will have auditoria seating 200 and 100, video facilities and bar, has been undertaken by the distribution concern, The Other Cinema, at a cost of £345,000. Although a good three-quarters of the initial outlay (£270,000) comes in a grant from the Greater London Council's Arts and Recreations Committee, the management company emphasises that the operation will be commercially self-supporting. The cinemas, which will be rented out for preview screenings during the day, are to be open from early evening onwards.

The larger auditorium will be given over to first runs, not necessarily exclusive, of films distributed either by The Other Cinema or independent distributors, 'commercial' or otherwise, who have no West End exhibition outlet of their own. The opening film will be what might be thought a reasonably safe bet, Godard's controversial *Je Vous Salue, Marie* (though there are no certainties any more, and the director's *Prénom: Carmen* was less than a howling success at the Camden Plaza), while later films will include the West German *Peppermint Freedom* and the Japanese comedy *Crazy Family*. The second auditorium is expected to house 'run-on' showings of these films if demand is there, as well as broad-based repertory seasons. But the promoters deny they are proselytisers, and stress in their publicity 'old-fashioned luxury' and the pleasing thought that the canopied box-office foyer is 'reminiscent of 1930s cinema design'.

TIM PULLEINE

Hong Kong

Chinese breakthrough

The 9th Hong Kong Film Festival had to weather both the coldest and wettest April in memory and some rumbles of criticism in the 'expat' press for its supposed elitism, but it continued unruffled along the purposive lines it has established over eight hard-fought years. The complaints seemed to boil down to a mixture of philistinism and barely suppressed resentment that the event is becoming increasingly Asian-oriented. They were not endorsed by the large contingent of overseas festival directors who came to Hong Kong specifically to see new Chinese and Asian movies, and were rewarded with some astonishing discoveries.

Without belittling Jerry Liu's International Section or Li Cheuk-To's retrospective of Hong Kong cinema, it has to be said that it was Leong Mo-Ling's Asian Section that set the pulses racing. Ms Leong assembled a selection of notable recent features from the region (including Hong Kong itself) and an enterprising four-part retrospective under the title 'Discovering Asian Masters'. Two of the masters—Yamanaka from Japan and Ghatak from India—already have considerable international reputations, but her other two choices—the Chinese Fei Mu and the Filipino Gerardo de Leon—broke new ground, reviving movies unseen for over thirty years.

Fei Mu (1906-1951) has suffered more than most Chinese film-makers from the depredations of time and political censure, but began to enjoy a revival of sorts in 1980, when Scott Meek discovered a print of his *Tianlun* (*Song of China*, 1935) in London. China Film Archive subsequently restored a print of his *Xiao Cheng zhi Chun* (*Spring in a Small Town*, 1948), which has been generally recognised as a masterpiece wherever it has been seen in the past two years. Leong Mo-Ling persuaded the Archive to make new prints of its other Fei Mu holdings, and put together a programme of all the surviving films that are not blocked by political or legal difficulties, including two films that Fei wrote but did not direct. This produced nothing else with the stature of *Spring in a Small Town*, but it certainly clarified the roots of that extraordinary film in Fei's enthusiasm for the traditional Chinese theatre. Watching Fei's adaptation of the Peking Opera *Zhan Jing Tang* (*Murder in the Oratory*, 1937), one had the eerie sensation of coming upon a spiritual ancestor of Syberberg, a director commit-

ted to a fully cinematic rethinking of theatrical forms.

The festival did equally heroic work in reviving the reputation of Gerardo de Leon (1913-1981), nearly all of whose 75-odd movies are believed lost in the Philippines. Leong uncovered prints of three long-vanished de Leon films in an old film warehouse in Hong Kong. De Leon was a sophisticated intellectual working in a gruellingly commercial film industry who managed to impose both a magisterial visual style and a consistent body of ideas on the most seemingly disparate and unpromising material. The most remarkable of the three rediscoveries in Hong Kong was *Dyesebel* (1953), a fantasy about an affair between man and mermaid. It moves from a detailed, neo-realist portrait of peasant life in a fishing village through scenes of mythological fantasy and sensuous romance to a *noirish* climax with a bravura worthy of Welles. The result is not a film about a literal mermaid, but a daringly erotic study of desire and its vagaries, a film about repression, sublimation and guilt.

But Leong's principal achievement was to reveal the 'new wave' in Mainland Chinese cinema. In a recent *SIGHT AND SOUND*, I wrote about the students of the Beijing Film Academy, China's film school, and noted that 'if there's ever a "new wave" in mainland cinema, then this will be the generation that breaks it.' It's gratifying to report that the wave has broken: the first generation of post-Cultural Revolution graduates from the Academy have now made their first features, and they are achieving a distinctively new kind of Chinese cinema. They are finding work at China's small, regional studios (where there are no large staffs of old-timers using up the annual quotas of film-stock on their projects) and some of them, at least, are managing to cut swathes through the film industry bureaucracy.

The festival screened two examples of this generation's work: Tian Zhuangzhuang's dispiriting *Jieyue* (*September*), an assigned project that the director accepted in order to gain experience and failed to rescue from sentimental bathos, and Chen Kaige's brilliant *Huang Tudi* (*Yellow Earth*), widely acclaimed as the best Chinese movie since 1949. The fact that *September* was readily available to the festival while Leong Mo-Ling had to fight to secure the print of *Yellow Earth* demonstrates that the 'new wave' directors have plenty of battles ahead. However, the rapturous reception won by *Yellow Earth* in Hong Kong has earned it invitations to many other festivals (including Edinburgh),

which may yet help the film to achieve a breakthrough in China's official attitudes to film exports. It has already achieved a breakthrough in Chinese film aesthetics.

Yellow Earth is set in a village in Northern Shaanxi Province in 1939, and it has a basis in fact: the central character is a Communist Army soldier sent to the village to collect folk songs as examples of peasant culture. He is billeted with a poor widower and his daughter and son, and has difficulty in establishing much of a relationship with them, especially the taciturn children. The film uses this situation as a summary and cypher of the CCP's search for a power base in rural China in the 1920s and 1930s. Far from showing a privileged intellectual bringing enlightenment to the untutored masses, the film depicts an encounter between two worlds, two ways of seeing, and shows both sides failing to live up to the expectations of the other. This objectivity is probably the film's most momentous contribution to present-day political and cultural debates in China.

But the film is also exquisitely beautiful. It speaks a language new to Chinese cinema, a language of muted colours, glances, unspoken thoughts, shadows and delicately modulated rhythms. The images derive from the tradition of Shaanxi peasant painting, just as the rhythms derive from the tempos (alternately languorous and hectic) of rural life. Chen Kaige (at 32, incredibly young by Chinese standards) turns old languages into a new language, just as he reclaims a 'lost' history and makes it contemporary. The summit of his achievement is that he makes his new language sing.

TONY RAYNS

Shanghai English

A Chinese Mr Rochester

Foreigners who have the chance to walk about Chinese cities on their own may notice long queues outside many cinemas. Often, the queues will be for foreign films, but the soundtrack invariably will be in putonghau (Mandarin Chinese). Before 1945, films from the West were shown in their original English-language versions. Then came subtitling, to open up the Chinese market, with Fox as the only Hollywood studio to prepare Chinese titles in the United States. Other companies used a firm run by an Italian family in Shanghai. The aim, at this stage, was no more than to make the action comprehensible; so many films were imported that it would have been impossible to do a complete translation for each one. Much of the original meaning was therefore lost, and there were often arguments among the Chinese film-going public about how films were to be interpreted.

The Shanghai Film Dubbing Studio was founded in the early 50s, with Chen Xuyi as its head. The first film dubbed by the studio was *Son of the Youth League*—a Soviet film, for obvious reasons. To date, the studio has dubbed some 600 films from more than thirty countries. It handles about three-quarters of the foreign films shown in China, the remainder being dubbed by the Peking and Changchun studios. The same translation teams also produce foreign-language versions of Chinese films for export, with the dubbed foreign-language dialogue usually being spoken

by Chinese. Sometimes university teachers or other language experts may be employed rather than professional actors.

In some cases, foreign residents in China—students or teachers—may be employed, and resident foreigners will also be enlisted for scenes in Chinese films requiring the presence of foreigners. Western students in Peking were used for a crowd scene supposedly set at San Francisco airport in a 1981 feature, giving the bizarre effect of an airport peopled entirely by travellers aged 18 to 25.

Chen Xuyi received a specialist English-language education in Shanghai, where he lived until 1946; from then until 1949 he took part in the Communist-led revolutionary movement. After that he worked full time as a dubbing director, on *Bicycle Thieves*, *Hamlet*, Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, *The Three Musketeers*, among others. Another key figure in the studio is Huang Tianmin, the script translator, who has been doing this work since the early 40s. In China, film scripts appear regularly in cinema and literary magazines. Because British or American scripts are seldom published, and the constraints on foreign currency expenditure mean that the extra cash for post-production dialogue scripts is not available, the translator has the demanding job of working from an original copy or a videotape. Sometimes explanations or descriptions have to be added to the translated dialogue script, from which the dubbing actors will work, in order to make the action comprehensible.

In the major cities such as Peking and Shanghai, some people become keen followers of the various dubbing actors' work. There are even people who learn



Man and mermaid: Gerardo de Leon's *Dyesebel*.

to imitate their voices—a way of compensating for the dearth of culture and entertainment in their own lives. One of the best known male dubbing actors was the late Qiu Yuefeng (his stage name means Autumn Moon and Wind), whose mother was a White Russian and whose gravelly, forceful voice suggested a man of great experience. He gave a remarkable performance as Mr Rochester in the film of *Jane Eyre*. Another senior dubbing actor, Shang Hua (64), is a major figure in the Shanghai studio. Hearing the wail of the beggar in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, you would never think it came from this scholarly figure, who spends every moment of his spare time either reading or fishing a home-made transistor from his black bag to listen to any sort of drama or opera.

The actress Li Zi dubbed the name part in the British television production of *Anna Karenina*. The novel has caused much controversy in China, partly because of Tolstoy's own ideology, partly because the heroine's actions contravene not just traditional Chinese morality but particularly the view of family ties, especially between parents and children, as far more important than sexual love. But however people may feel about the work, Anna's voice, as interpreted by Li Zi, brought tears to the eyes of many. This striking actress also dubbed the name part in *Jane Eyre*. Her delivery of the line 'Life is simply the endurance of hardship' became so well known that it has provided a bit of literary colour for many a romance between young Chinese.

For obvious reasons, official decisions have to be made about what is and is not suitable for showing in China. Consequently, ordinary people will not be able to see the latest box-office hits immediately. But if there is nothing in them which conflicts fundamentally with the criteria of acceptability, the chances are that they will sooner or later be translated and shown. Any censorship tends to consist of the

decision whether or not to show a film, rather than cuts made later. An over-explicit sex scene (by Chinese standards, which are very restrained) might, however, be cut from an otherwise acceptable film, as in the case of the thriller *The Serpent*. Violent scenes would be unlikely to be censored. Bad language would be translated accurately, unless it involved insults to Karl Marx, Communism, etc.

On the whole, foreign films shown publicly tend to be fairly bland commercial productions with mass appeal, rather than art films. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (the recent remake), *Sea Wolves*, *Evil Under the Sun* and *Death on the Nile* are British films which have been well received in the last few years. *Evil Under the Sun* played continuously to full houses for sixty days in Xian, the capital of Shaanxi Province in Central China—a total of 757 performances. *Gandhi* and *Chariots of Fire* both played in the recent Festival of British Film. *Breaker Morant* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* have been shown, but played to half-empty houses—a most unusual situation.

In the projection room of the China Film Company in Peking, or the auditorium of the Peking Institute of Cinematography, rather different fare is on offer—perhaps Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* or recent releases from Britain, France or Japan. These are restricted screenings for people connected with the film business: film school students, actors, directors and technicians. In theory, actors and workers from the theatre could probably attend too, though this would be unlikely to happen. There is still a tendency for theatre people in China to look down on films.

ZHONG MING

Oberhausen

Brazilian Indians and a US objector

The Oberhausen short film festival, born 31 years ago at the height of the Cold War, has tried, traditionally, to find 'a way to the neighbour'. Shorts from the Soviet bloc countries and, latterly, from the Third World have been particularly encouraged. Now, though, with the imminent departure of the festival director Wolfgang Ruf, change threatens. Rumours abounded at this year's festival in April that interest groups within the film industry were pushing for a more commercial bias, even to the point of including music videos, a new-fangled frivolity against which the festival has so far resolutely set its face. Whatever the future holds, however, Oberhausen's



Povo da Lua, Povo do Sangue.

finances have for the time being been secured with the host Land, North Rhine-Westphalia, now paying half the running costs.

Documentaries, which featured heavily among the 104 competition films from 36 countries, took most of the prizes. Sometimes, though, it seemed that a worthy theme was worth more than formal finesse. *Totem*, a turgid Danish documentary about punk culture, for example, was praised for its impressive insights into the young. *Rangier*, about East German railway shift workers, took several prizes but drew a mixed response. For some western viewers, it was an especially esoteric and unengaging slab of socialist realism; others, however, were impressed by its beautifully crafted soundtrack and black and white cinematography, and by the vividness with which it captured the austerity, hazards and dignity of an unspectacular profession. Although few experimental films won prizes, *Syntagma*, Valie Export's display of visual pyrotechnics on a Laingian theme of the divided self, and *La Dernière Image*, 'a duel between a woman and a camera', both received special mentions.

Les Ecuelles, from Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), dispensed, like *Rangier*, with a commentary, building a portrait of villagers carving the wooden bowls of the title through strong, unadorned images. The film, shot in conditions where the director had to wait six weeks for his rushes and addressed to an audience unaccustomed to film, was admirable for its simplicity and lack of pretension. But it still looked painfully unsophisticated beside many other entries. It highlighted the difficulty of measuring like against unlike in a competition where the only common denominator is a maxi-

mum running time of 35 minutes.

The top prize went to two films from Brazil, which both in different ways combined emotional conviction with aesthetic distinction. *Povo da Lua, Povo do Sangue* (*People of the Moon, People of Blood*) was an elegiac portrait of the Yanomani Indian people pieced together through black and white photographs. It caught the beauty and strangeness of the Yanomani and drew attention to the threat posed to this dying culture by contact with the white man. *Em Nome da Seguranca Nacional* rousingly denounced the persecution of political dissidents with a blend of documentary material, striking dramatised sequences and stylised courtroom drama based on a symbolic trial of the security law staged at São Paulo's National Theatre.

Witness to War: Dr Charlie Clements, from the United States, was among the most moving documentaries. Scion of a distinguished military family, Clements was headed for an illustrious Air Force career until, horrified by his experiences in Vietnam, he refused to fly any more missions. Committed to a psychiatric hospital, he found his identity and beliefs in smithereens. Twelve years later, having retrained as a doctor, he worked in the field in El Salvador under daily fire from the very bombers he used to fly. Carefully avoiding hagiography, this was a remarkable portrait of a remarkable man who comes to stand for the conscience of a generation.

Finally, in the fiction stakes, two short films from Czechoslovakia were much admired: Jan Svankmajer's high gothic visualisation of *The Pit and the Pendulum* and his delightful vignette *Do Pivnice* (*Into the Cellar*), the Alice in Wonderland-like adventures of a little girl



Qiao Zhen, new head of the Shanghai Dubbing Studio.

sent down to the cellar to fetch the potatoes, told with a visual virtuosity and a wayward sense of humour that earned the film the Critics' Prize as well as captivating the perhaps more significant arbiters of public taste at the *Kinderkino*.

SHEILA JOHNSTON

Berlin

Family stories from Japan and Germany

Dogged by last-minute defections of stars and directors, the Competition section of the 1985 Berlin Film Festival was relatively low key. This is not to say that the selection was quite as bad as most people made out, but simply to indicate that the main programme has come increasingly to rely on a high level of glamour and glitter in order to provide the 'angles' necessary to keep up with the rich and varied programmes of the other sections. The Competition, with its focus on visible new product, was designed to pull along the Market, the Forum, the Information section and the Children's Festival. Now, it seems, these vigorous sideshows pull along the Competition.

As at the 1984 Venice festival, the French fielded a strong Competition team. The most surprising was Michel Deville's lively adaptation of René Beletto's novel *Sur la Terre comme au Ciel*, appropriately retitled *Pétil en la Demeure* (*Danger in Delay*), a welcome change from his less demanding comedies. The most accomplished was Marguerite Duras' *Les Enfants*, which proves that her novel *Ah Ernesto!* (from which the Straubs also drew inspiration for their wonderful *En Rachâchant*) is one of her most open, intriguing and amusing texts. The most controversial (though not as controversial as the selectors hoped or expected) was Godard's *Je Vous Salue, Marie*, which must surely mark the end of the old fox's flirtatious relationship with feminism.

This is the philosophical Godard, the nagging, self-lacerating Godard who tries to prevent you enjoying the airier but fairier, gentler, *Breathless* to *Slow Motion* Godard. Interestingly, though, its short companion piece, *Le Livre de Marie* by Anne-Marie Miéville, manages to off-balance the depressing feeling of another blind alley up which Godard expects all who have loved him in the past to follow without question. The prizes, however, apart from the Best Script award to Duras, went elsewhere. *Wetherby*, of course, took a notable first prize (though this was slightly diminished by the political ex-aquo to Rainer

Simon's East German *The Woman and the Stranger*).

The Forum focused on a selection of Japanese films headed by what is fast becoming the year's cult movie, *Crazy Family*, by Sogo Ishii, who at twenty-six has already made five features and four shorts and was recently in London taking a crash course in English so he can fill in the forms handed him in Berlin by the world's festival directors. *Crazy Family* is the logical extension of *Family Game*, made by Ishii's friend Morita Yoshimitsu. The absurdist explosion of the 'Convenient Society' (an extra character intrudes on the space designed for a nuclear family) and a zany chipping away at the conventions governing Japanese life (played out through the measures taken against an invasion of white ants) are evidence of a cruel sense of humour not to everyone's taste. However, Ishii's imagination and verve are most taking. *Crazy Family* will open in the autumn at The Other Cinema's new London venue, the Metro, and Ishii's short punkish extravaganza, *Shuffle*, should be seen at the London and Edinburgh festivals.

The other Japanese films showed a more orthodox concern for the ecological and ideological health of their country. *The Stolen Sea* by Noriaki Tsuchimoto examined the effect of a spillage of nuclear waste on the life of a fishing community, while *The Lute of the Blind Monks of Satsuma* by Atsushi Suwa and *I Lived But...* by Kazuo Inoue meditated, respectively, on the spiritual power of Buddhist conceptions of music and on the cinematic magic of Ozu. The Japanese film in competition,

Seburi Monogatari by Sadao Nakajima, dealt elegantly with the effect of itinerant groups on distrustful village communities. There was, in addition, a special screening of *Tokio Saiban*, a 310-minute documentary on the postwar military trials by the veteran Masaki Kobayashi, which attracted the type of individual attention (rare at festivals where spectators are forever looking over their shoulders) that was accorded to *Heimat* at Venice last year.

There was a similar feeling of an 'event' about the controversial screening of Thomas Harlan's *Wundkanal* and Robert Kramer's *Unser Nazi*, a 'package' already opened in Venice but obviously more pertinent in Berlin, where the story of Alfred Filbert, deputy head of the Nazi secret service, is with reason better known. In *Wundkanal: Execution for Four Voices*, Filbert plays himself, a Nazi kidnapped and interrogated about his war crimes. It began as a fiction but turned into a documentary on an attempt to destroy, psychologically, a man still convinced he is the victim of insufficient recognition by his country for the loyalty he showed in doing his job. *Unser Nazi*, on the other hand, started off as a documentary on the making of *Wundkanal* and ended as a powerful analysis of the conflicting expectations built up around the project by just about everybody concerned.

The two films, it may be noted, are as much about Veit Harlan, the 'official' director of the Third Reich and Thomas' father, as about the 80-year-old Alfred Filbert. Harlan feels that the emphasis which has been placed

on the unresolved relationship with his father (who died on Capri 'unrepentant') has perhaps been overplayed due to the reluctance of the audience to confront the Nazi within us all.

Finally, to confirm the dangers of showing classics from the time when films used to be movies, the Jazz Retrospective and the screenings of a reconstructed *Queen Kelly*, with an excellent score by Adolph Tandler and stills to patch up the gaps in the story, and the extraordinary coloured version of *Dr Caligari*, with a score by Giuseppe Becce performed by a 20-piece orchestra, would on their own have justified the trip to Berlin.

DON RANVAUD

Joan complete

A Dreyer discovery

Carl Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was first shown on 21 April 1928 in Copenhagen. There are records of two prints being viewed by the Danish Censors at the time. Both of these were considered lost. In December 1928, the original negative was destroyed in a fire at UFA in Berlin. Dreyer later made a new version using surviving outtakes and rushes (of 85,000m shot, the first version used 2,210m). This second version was itself considered lost until Lo Duca found it in Paris in 1952. He added music by Albinoni, Bach, Vivaldi and Scarlatti, and took the opportunity for some creative re-editing. This print—understandably detested by Dreyer—went into circulation in the 1950s.

In the 1960s, the Danish Film



Sogo Ishii's *Crazy Family*.

Museum assembled as complete a version as possible using the prints of foreign archives, but were very clear that this was not the original film. Now one of the 1928 prints has been discovered and for the first time in 57 years it is possible to see the film as Dreyer intended. It was found in, of all places, a psychiatric hospital outside Oslo. A print had, apparently, been bought or borrowed to screen to the patients, and had remained in the hospital ever since. It is in perfect condition—there is only one join in the entire print. Though a dupe positive, the print—whose visual quality was attested by a National Film Theatre screening in May—is in better condition than many new prints from old negatives.

The newly discovered print is, as it happens, almost the same length as the reconstructed version. It is clear that the reconstruction broadly followed the development of the original. The differences are mainly aesthetic (though I don't recall the blood-letting scene being so horrific): the original uses different camera angles, shots are held longer or cut off in mid-flow. Dreyer's idiosyncratic montage technique, his particular sense of rhythm and of keeping the spectator in suspense by constantly drawing up short in his editing, are much more in evidence in this print. In short, it fully confirms Dreyer's reputation as an avant-garde film-maker.

MARK NASH

Don't shoot!

Colonel Redl and the search for security

Istvan Szabo's *Colonel Redl*, which premiered at the Budapest Film Week in February, is the tale of a poor boy at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who rises to become the head of military intelligence. He is instructed by Archduke Franz Ferdinand to uncover—or invent—a plot among his fellow-officers. The ensuing prosecution will cause a scandal about the 'enemy within' and stiffen the loyalty of the officer corps. As Redl goes about his unsavoury work, it becomes clear, however, that he is the fall guy. Finally, locked in a hotel room, he is offered a revolver and the chance to do the honourable thing. The year is 1913.

Beneath this story of political provocation is a portrait of the kind of man suitable for such a task. Redl seeks to make himself the ideal military man by subordinating every emotion to loyalty to the Hapsburg Empire: denying family, betraying friends, marrying for political

connections and to disguise his homosexuality. 'He is not a conman,' Szabo said. 'He really and truly wants to become another person.'

It is here that the links with Szabo's other films become clear. The award-winning *Mephisto*—and *Colonel Redl* was made by the same team, actor Klaus Maria Brandauer, director of photography Lajos Koltai, screenwriter Peter Dobai—also had at its centre a man whom ambition made vulnerable. And both *Mephisto* and *Confidence* dealt with the theme of security. 'It's a basic, universal problem: without security you can't live. Different people find it in different ways: in love, in family, in work, in power. Sometimes, however, in war, at important historical moments, you can see the fight to achieve security more accurately. In *Confidence*, the people who have to go underground against the Nazis find it defensively. *Mephisto* on the other hand goes on the offensive—he thinks that by having everybody's love he will achieve security. Redl tries to find it by becoming a member of the ruling elite.'

The star role given to Brandauer—and he is as excellent as he was as *Mephisto*—focuses the film on the single central character. 'My earlier films were about several characters,' Szabo said, 'but this did not give me the opportunity to go deeply into one character. The psychological analysis remained on the surface. In *Mephisto* and *Colonel Redl*, I

was really interested in finding out a lot about one person. I tried to use a literary method, the so-called development narrative. I wrote the script for Brandauer: it was a kind of Christmas present.'

Colonel Redl was loosely based on a true story, which had already inspired John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*, but Szabo considers the original relatively unimportant. 'Who knows what the truth was? The only version we have is that issued by the Austrian War Office, and they had an interest in getting their version accepted.' Did Redl commit suicide? 'They said he did. But perhaps his last words before shooting himself were "Don't shoot!"' It's worth noting that several films at Budapest this year had distant historical themes. Many recent Hungarian films have examined and tried to come to terms with Hungary's modern history; the films set in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, however, seem to be using the period as a source of metaphors about the present.

Szabo discourages direct political interpretations. None the less, the parallel with the treason trials of the Stalinist era is striking. When leading members of the Soviet Communist Party were tried and executed in 1936 and 38, when the Hungarian Foreign Minister Lazlo Rajk suffered the same fate in 1949, the victims almost seemed accomplices in their own denunciations. Their profound loyalty to the Party went as far as

accepting the necessity of their own deaths, perhaps. *Colonel Redl* may be about the dangers of such loyalty, which allows the kind of provocation of which Redl himself is simultaneously the organiser and the victim.

Szabo is currently preparing to direct Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* in Vienna—before *Colonel Redl*, he directed *Tannhäuser* in Paris—and is at work on a new script, subject shrouded, but another historical story, this time set in the period of the First World War, with a strong anti-militarist feeling. It is to be an American production, but made in Europe, set in Germany and probably using Hungarian facilities. Szabo's script collaborator this time is David Robinson, film critic of *The Times*.

JERRY PALMER

INPUT

Sponsorship and public television

Public television is embattled. In the United States, the Reagan administration is cutting the thin but crucial federal lifeline. Throughout Europe, public service networks, fearful of audience losses and 'wall-to-wall *Dallas*', are angling for foreign sales and co-production money. Here in Britain, with the Peacock Committee now at work, the spectre of advertising on the BBC looms.

Nor, judging from many of the



Colonel Redl: Klaus Maria Brandauer.

87 titles screened at the spring conference of INPUT, the public television forum, does the current output of public TV give much cause for optimism. Delegates from 30 countries, but predominantly from Europe and North America, met this year at Marseilles, under the auspices of INA, to discuss ways forward.

All was not gloom, however, and *Coal Not Dole* (Channel 4) and Jon Alpert's American survival pieces for NBC's *Today* show proved that vital and engaging programmes can be produced with little artifice and at a low cost. It was also evident that, without a space protected from the immediate demands of the marketplace, it is unlikely that such valuable programmes as the accounts of repressed histories in Loni Ding's *Nisei Soldier* (WNET/13) and William Klein and Julia Reichert's *Seeing Red: Stories of American Communists*, as well as the encyclopaedic bicentenary tribute, *La Boutique Infernale de Denis Diderot* (INA), would have been produced.

Although the key question of production money was not often raised in discussions, it was the subject of two debates. One of these, 'Sponsorship, a New Challenge for Public Television', was actually sponsored by a bank, the Société Marseillaise de Crédit, and sought to encourage a dialogue between entrepreneurs and programme-makers. Jim Day, president of Publivision Inc, described the key role of sponsorship in the United States. In 1984, 30 per cent of the programme costs of some 170 public TV stations loosely affiliated to the PBS network, a total of \$57m, was provided by corporate underwriting.

The eight largest sponsors are oil companies, with Mobil and Exxon at the top of the list. Next in line are the communications giants AT&T, Xerox and IBM. All these companies, Mr Day said, use sponsorship to enhance their public image. This has worrying consequences. First, a loosening of the rules governing credits has allowed the sponsor to indulge (where formerly he was restricted to a discreet one-line acknowledgment) in promotional appeals indistinguishable from commercials. Second, sponsorship has come to affect programming. The sponsor often wishes to be associated only with particular kinds of programmes: cultural and scientific programmes are acceptable, contentious subject matter very often is not.

As INPUT 85 closed, further along the Côte d'Azur, in Cannes, MIP TV opened and it was clear that the forces which are shaping the future of television were there and that public service ideals were not on the agenda.

JOHN STEWART



Marie Seton.

Marie Seton

Biographer of Eisenstein and Ray

On hearing of the sudden death in London of Marie Seton, Satyajit Ray wrote, 'It was difficult to believe that she is no more; she was more alive than most people I could think of...'

But who was Marie Seton? Her name may not be very familiar to the young film buffs of today, but to those of us in middle age or beyond, her name conjures up *Time in the Sun*, a film she wove together from the many thousands of feet shot by Eisenstein in Mexico, her definitive book on Eisenstein, and her biographies of Paul Robeson, Satyajit Ray and Pandit Nehru.

Her involvement with India was perhaps one of the most interesting and important facets of her life; an involvement which, although going back almost a hundred years through family connections in the days of the British Raj (of which Marie would have no part), started for her in 1955 when the Indian Ministry of Education, in association with the British Film Institute, asked her to travel all over India lecturing on film appreciation. I had a hand in this enterprise in my capacity as Films Officer to the Government of India in London, and what an enterprise it turned out to be! With her provocative and stimulating lectures she breathed new life into India's then flagging film society movement. Students and film society members found her lectures full of passion for good cinema in India and elsewhere; they instantly recognised that she fully understood the language and grammar of cinema and her inspiration remains with them till today. Frail though she was, Marie carted heavy cans of films around with her as part of

her personal baggage as others would tote books. I remember her telling me that she showed some of Chaplin's short films to villagers in Bihar, most of whom had at that time never seen a film before, and they laughed till they cried.

Marie will also be remembered for instantly recognising the genius of Satyajit Ray when she saw the first print of *Pather Panchali* in Calcutta. With her usual vigour and determination she blasted away until government officials, who had been reluctant to allow the film out of India, relented and *Pather Panchali* was screened at the Cannes Festival to instant acclaim. Her friendship with Ray and his family grew from that time on, and she wrote in 1971 a major work on him, *Satyajit Ray—Portrait of a Director*.

Marie was always a great communicator and she loved nothing better than to sit and smoke the inevitable cigarette, and talk into the small hours about everything under the sun. Her knowledge ranged from Mexican folk art to Mozart, to film and theatre. Every person she met, every *objet d'art* she saw, every play or film she had seen, was carefully tucked away in her memory to be brought out

at a moment's notice to illustrate a point or reinforce an opinion. She always enjoyed the company of young people and they seemed perfectly at home with her, and she helped many of them whether on a personal or professional level.

She suggested Ben Kingsley's name to Sir Richard Attenborough when he was searching for an actor to play Gandhi, and she flew to India to watch the progress of the film on location. More recently she had been involved as a consultant in the new projected TV mini-series *Indira Gandhi—A Tryst with Destiny*, working closely with the producer Judith de Paul. She once wrote of her long-standing friendship with Indira Gandhi that within a few minutes of their first meeting, in December 1955, they seemed to have known each other all their lives; and their relationship lasted as Marie put it, 'through thick and thin', for all of 29 years. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the tragic death of her friend, Indira, shattered Marie to the core, and perhaps because of this she decided to stop battling against pneumonia and slip quietly away early Sunday morning on 17 February 1985.

PAM CULLEN

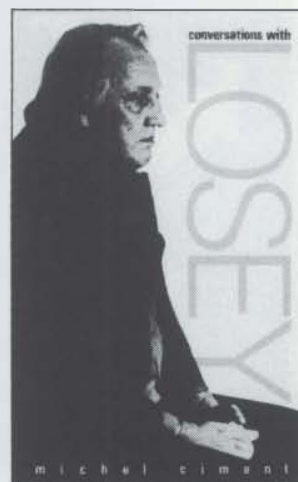
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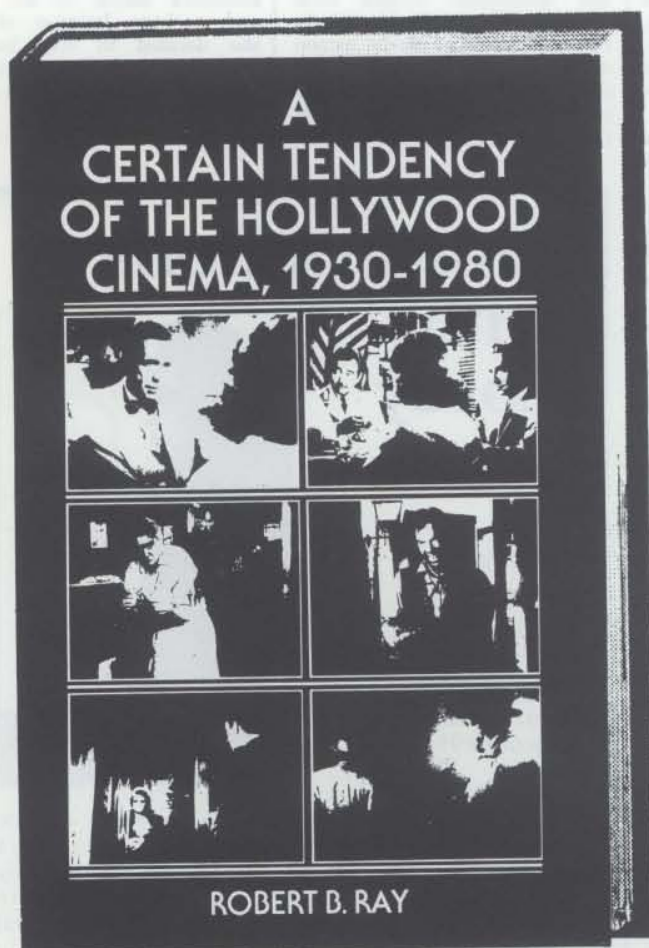
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How to Live in Air Conditioning

Jonathan Rosenbaum

'A feeling of having no choice is becoming more and more widespread in American life, and particularly among successful people, who are supposedly free beings. On a concrete plane, the lack of choice is often a depressing reality. In national election years, you are free to choose between Johnson and Goldwater or Johnson and Romney or Reagan, which is the same as choosing between a Chevrolet and a Ford—there is a marginal difference in styling. Just as in American hotel rooms you can decide whether or not to turn on the air conditioner (that is your business), but you cannot open the window.'

—Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam*, 1967

'I await the end of cinema with optimism.'

—Jean-Luc Godard,
Cahiers du Cinéma, 1965

Twenty years later, both these general sentiments describe an impasse in American life that is vividly reflected in the movies we see and the ways that we see them. If the range of cultural choices apparently available at any given time merits some correlation with the range of political choices, it is also true that Godard's optimistic apocalypse heralds a new scale of values, though we don't yet know enough about these to be able to judge them with any security. Significantly, the Los Angeles critic David Ehrenstein concludes his recent book, *Film: The Front Line 1984*, by citing Godard's remark, implying that avant-garde film-makers of the mid-80s hover over the same ambiguous threshold as everyone else. Whether we condemn or applaud the prospect, a first priority might be a simple evaluation of where we are.

It probably isn't being too presump-

tuous to assume that, in one way or another, everyone reading these lines is awaiting the end of some kind of cinema, either optimistically or pessimistically. Whatever name or interpretation we give to this climate, we probably all feel that something is in the process of ending—unless we feel it has ended already. Something is also in the process of beginning; but whatever we choose to call it, I don't think we can call it cinema in the old sense. Just as the widespread interest in film that characterised the 60s was superseded in the 70s by a widespread interest in *film-makers*, the agnosticism about narrative which began with the Nouvelle Vague has ultimately led to a belief in headlines rather than stories—a belief that can be

Everyone reading these lines is awaiting the end of some kind of cinema

found throughout the mainstream of contemporary American media. This change in attitude can be detected in the way news is reported on American television as well as in the more obvious forms of popular entertainment. To cite Godard again (speaking more recently, in Wim Wenders' *Room 666*), 'in *Dallas* there is no story.'

When one hears that firms in Seattle and Toronto are planning to colour in old black and white Hollywood classics on image processors and release these coloured versions on videocassettes, it certainly feels as though we're at the end of something. There are plenty of other signs. One can look at the hysterically fragmented editing of *Dune* and *The Cotton Club* (which again reduces narrative to nothing but headlines), or the growth of cable tv, or the repack-

aging of old films on tape and laser disc, or the proliferating academic study of film in the United States—four interlocking phenomena which I will shortly discuss in more detail—and get the same sense of a historical period being sealed off, so that the past isn't only another country but a different planet, a different language, a different set of aspirations. Like Mary McCarthy, we can learn this new language well or badly and say all kinds of different things with it, but we can't use it to lead us back to cinema in the old sense (cinema, let us say, that was still on speaking terms with the era of Griffith, Murnau and Stroheim). That's a window which has been nailed shut, and unless we break through the glass—destroy the institutions and the technology which separate us from the past—we have to get used to living in air conditioning.

One central fact about the new American climate is that neither poetry nor criticism are publicly acknowledged as attractive vocations today, *except* as means to an end, which is power. To be more specific, twenty years ago, when I was a college student, several of my classmates wanted to be poets or critics. As a college teacher, I'm exposed to a fair number of students today, and if any view themselves as potential poets, they keep this information to themselves. A friend of mine in his early twenties who writes like James Agee and is a Harvard drop-out has no professional or vocational interest in writing either poetry or criticism; he writes Hollywood scripts, and his ambition is to direct them. I think his situation is characteristic; and as a corollary to this, most ambitious film critics I know in the States aspire to be not better critics, but more powerful. The irony is that, in the 40s, Agee himself aspired to be a film-maker.

Students want to *be* directors or critics more than they want to direct films or

write criticism. The legacy of auteurism is still with us, and while the death of the author may be an established fact in film theory and (not incidentally) most commercial film-making practice, it carries precious little weight in the more groupie-oriented media. Even when half the myth dies, the other half lives on, and if students don't aspire to make David Lynch's *Dune* or Francis Coppola's *The Cotton Club*, they still aspire to be David Lynch or Francis Coppola. They don't aspire to make Chaplin's *A King in New York*, which in 1957 Rossellini had the wisdom to call the film of a free man. I don't think anyone with eyes or ears could seriously call *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* or *The Cotton Club* or *Dune* the films of free men, but they're certainly perceived as the films of powerful men—men, let us say (and certainly not women), who are allied to power—and that's what seems to count finally, both in the US and elsewhere.

From the standpoint of film criticism, the intellectual climate in New York today is impoverished compared with that of either London or Paris, and the reasons for this are, I think, ideological. During a visit to New York from London in the mid-70s, I attended a press show and remember being struck by the contrast with press shows in London, where drinks are often served after the film and critics are encouraged to talk to one another about what they've just seen. I asked a prominent New York critic why this practice was less common

In London... critics are often delighted if their ideas are stolen...

in the States, and he replied, 'You can't talk about a film right after you've seen it—other critics might steal your ideas!' In London, where ideas are less likely to be seen as private property, critics are often delighted if their ideas are stolen, because this means that their ideas have power. In New York, only the critics are supposed to have power, and the ideas have to fend for themselves.

A few years ago, shortly before Antonioni's *Identification of a Woman* was screened at the New York Film Festival, Vincent Canby wrote a review in the *New York Times* suggesting that Mr Antonioni should study the films of Woody Allen if he wished to make films that were less pretentious. As a direct consequence, scores of advance tickets were returned to the box-office and the distributor who planned to release the film dropped it like a hot potato. One could cite many such stories, but the point is that the relative isolation of New York critics from one another, bred mainly by competitiveness (and such practices as 'special' screenings for powerful individuals), not to mention their collective isolation from critics elsewhere, has led to a gradual deterioration in the intellectual climate since the 60s. The final irony, of course, is that

to have a lot of power as a film critic in the US usually means, in one sense, to be owned by the film industry. Which is another way of saying that power of this kind is ultimately institutional rather than personal, despite some appearances to the contrary, and that the industry and general public are usually in agreement that popular criticism is merely a subdivision of promotion, which is run by institutions. The reason, in fact, why certain American critics are accorded superstar status is precisely the degree to which they reflect the institutionalised power of the industry.

If a characteristic American publication of the 60s was *The Village Voice* or *Rolling Stone*, perhaps the equivalent magazine today would be *People*. At present, *The Village Voice*, despite a few sophisticated writers, is fundamentally governed by an omnipresent house style and a fixed set of attitudes which are possibly even more rigid than those of Agee's former employer, *Time*, in its heyday. In terms of the *Voice's* relation

to 'difficult' films, its position of power remains important, but its service policy of dealing with pre-determined and pre-digested genres and institutions severely limits its value as a news publication.

For instance, one can read almost nothing in the *Voice* about the burgeoning underground movement of chiefly Super-8 films and videotapes shown regularly in such clubs as The Pyramid, Limbo Lounge and Danceteria. It was at one of these that I first saw a 35mm projection of *The New World*, the first part of *Stranger than Paradise*, and while the atmosphere there was hardly conducive to close analysis, it is nevertheless quite unremarkable that the *Voice* chose not to cover the event. What it chooses to cover, and only partially, are works shown in cinemas and by institutions—in contrast to the regular coverage given to more marginal films by Jonas Mekas in the *Voice* twenty years ago, which included reviews of works in progress which he saw in private lofts.



Films of free men. Above: *A King in New York* (1957). Below: Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* (1984).





Above: *Dune*. Running to stand still. Below: *Chain Letters*. 'The odds on such a film getting a decent run in New York . . . seem abysmally low.'



In a recent *Variety* article by Linda Beath of Spectra Films, one reads that 1984 was a peak year for foreign films in the States, although signs of the industry's 'waning enthusiasm' were already visible 'by the middle of the year'. On the one hand, 'While the annual surveys prior to 1983 listed only one to three films with subtitles earning \$1 million or more domestically, in 1983 over twenty-four titles tallied box-office figures of over the million dollar mark.' But at the same time, 'The massive acquisition policies of 1982 and 1983 had produced results that were financially unsatisfactory to the studio accountants, and to distributors and exhibitors alike.' The article reports that many French producers are now concentrating on 'smaller budget films, aimed solely at their native market or larger budget films aimed at conquering the us, but with equity participation by American investors.' More generally, it predicts

that 1985 may see some increased exposure for art films on pay tv and videocassettes, 'but the late 80s look much more interesting.'

It's all a matter of relativity, of course. When I was in New York for two weeks last Christmas, by far the best new film I saw was Mark Rappaport's nearly finished *Chain Letters*, which Rappaport showed me on an editing table. The odds on such a film getting a decent run in New York or Rappaport making any more 16mm features for under \$150,000 seem abysmally low, I'm sorry to say, and once again it looks as though European institutions are having to come to his rescue.

For the time being, though, we have the extraordinary success of a low-budget, independent feature called *Stranger than Paradise*—another film made in freedom and, incidentally, another which celebrates anything but power. The media's attitude towards this

is, of course, to try to turn writer-director Jim Jarmusch into another Jonathan Demme or David Lynch—that is, to assign power not to powerless people but to an *image* of powerless people, including a supposedly powerless director (and, secondarily, to drown the film in a flood of hype that its legitimate virtues could not possibly support). On the surface, at least, it may seem to resemble a Preston Sturges version of the American Dream come true.

Even the media can't hide the paradoxical fact that Jarmusch enjoys a kind of working freedom which Lucas or Coppola can only dream about, or hype into media existence. To be more specific, if we can speak of the spectator's freedom being closely linked to the freedom of the film-maker, I think one can say in Bazinian fashion that the freedom of *Stranger than Paradise* has something to do with the use of long takes, and the absence of freedom

Jarmusch enjoys a kind of working freedom which Lucas or Coppola can only dream about

in *Dune* and *The Cotton Club* has something to do with rapid editing. Significantly, both films are fantasies of other periods mired helplessly in the present, while *Stranger than Paradise* deals with the fantasies and realities of people who, like the spectators of *Dune* and *The Cotton Club*, are stuck helplessly in the present.

The fragmented editing associated with Eisenstein has by now degenerated through tv commercials to the point where it achieves its apotheosis in the average rock video, through a form which equalises and synthesises all sorts of contradictory and incompatible material into a kind of affectless mush supported by a disco beat. (Giorgio Moroder's efforts to turn *Metropolis* into a feature-length rock video, well analysed by Thomas Elsaesser in a recent *Monthly Film Bulletin*, may represent the apogee of this genre.) Any sustained, contemplative lingering over a mood, idea, person, object or event is anathema to this kind of discourse. The makers of *Dune* and *The Cotton Club* sacrifice their greatest potential strengths—respectively, the visual gifts of David Lynch and the talents of several black dancers—to the nihilistic dictates of the music video, which supposedly assures the widest possible audience. Consequently, the non-narrative aspects of Lynch's visual imagination and the qualities of pure spectacle found in dance are torn asunder by a frenetic montage monster born out of computer demographics which prevents us from looking too long or too closely at anything. Both films have seemingly busy narratives which lead nowhere, because they lack the dramatic variations which make narrative compelling.

By contrast, the narrative of *Stranger than Paradise* is spare and uncluttered, which leaves the audience free to look at the actors and locations. Ironically, one sign of this freedom is the characters' recognition of their own confinement: as Eddie says of Cleveland, 'You come to some place new and everything looks just the same.' More concretely, it is the kind of narrative space in which filmmakers, characters and spectators are all free to make mistakes and explore alternatives, simply by virtue of the fact that they're all free to keep moving without being hampered by computer demographics.

It should be added that the lessons of such a success are not entirely lost on Hollywood, even if Hollywood invariably translates these lessons into bigger budgets. As evidence of this, an article by Dale Pollock in the *Los Angeles Times* early this year is illuminating:

In a new plan beginning today, the union will reduce the up-front pay for directors, assistant directors and unit production managers by 50% for movies that cost less than \$1.5 million, and by 40% for feature films that cost between \$1.5 million and \$2.5 million.

The guild characterises the plan as 'an unprecedented move for the motion picture industry.'[. . .]

'The time has come to recognise the problem that there are a lot of productions out there that are not using our people,' Michael Franklin, national executive director of the guild, said Monday. 'Non-union films are increasing. We have to start coming to grips with this.'

The article goes on to cite Alan Rudolph's *Choose Me* and John Sayles' *The Brother from Another Planet* as recent successes that cost less than \$1 million. It adds that, in a recent interview, Sayles said he had to resign from the Directors Guild because he could not afford to pay his own guild-mandated salary, plus that of an assistant director and unit production manager, from the \$750,000 budgeted for his last film.

This de-escalation offers a hopeful sign, but it is clearly not enough to guarantee freedom. The relative roles that can be played by stars in Europe and the us is instructive. While the presence of Delphine Seyrig in *Jeanne Dielman* and Julie Christie in *The Gold Diggers* enabled Chantal Akerman and Sally Potter to make the films they wanted in 35mm, the power of final cut held by certain American superstars such as Robert Redford, Richard Gere and Goldie Hawn has virtually sabotaged such films as *The Natural*, the remake of *Breathless*, and *Swing Shift*.

Sometimes freedom at the production level can be translated into commercial success only when the distributor and/or exhibitor decides to nurse an unusual film through a difficult period until it achieves box-office health: Ben Barenholtz's handling of *Eraserhead* and Dan Talbot and Jeff Lipsky's handling of both *Chan Is Missing* and *My Dinner*



Hollywood star power: Goldie Hawn in *Swing Shift*.

with *André* are models of this delicate process. (Regarding the latter film, I recall a rather desperate transitional period when a free screening in New York with complementary wine and cheese was offered to the public in an effort to stir up interest.) But this is the work of individuals, not institutions or computers. If the American Film Institute miraculously co-produced *Eraserhead* and the most intelligent film programming in the us is to be found at Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley and the Art Institute of Chicago, this is clearly the work of certain people at the AFI as well as Edith Kramer and Richard Peña, and only secondarily the institutional bases at their disposal.

One can only turn back to the AFI to see the effects of institutional power being used to preserve the status quo.

In a capitalist society, legislating culture in any manner is denying full creative control to capitalists

In a recent issue of *American Film*, Charlton Heston (whom Michel Mourlet once called an axiom and who today, as axiomatic as Ronald Reagan, is president of the AFI's board of trustees) expressed amazement—his word—at the discovery that the film author's editorial control was established by French law in 1957. After implying previously in an article that French directors who benefited from state subsidies—presumably film-makers such as Bresson, Rivette and Demy—were denied the creative control of people like Spielberg and Lucas, Heston drew fire from Michel Ciment and Marcel Ophuls, and promptly conceded his error, but none the less concluded that 'To suggest that

creative control can be *legislated* in a democratic society is, I think, debatable.' Which I interpret, rightly or wrongly, as meaning that in a capitalist society, legislating culture in *any* manner is denying full creative control to capitalists.

But Heston's misapprehension of creative control in France is merely symptomatic of a general crisis in communication between the us and Europe which the so-called 'communications explosion' can only exacerbate. The brutal truth is that communications equipment often reduces our capacity to communicate. Think of the increasing role played by telephone answering machines in urban society and you have a model for the double-edged role played by video technology in relation to the media. Thanks to cable tv, Americans live not in a global village but in a loose network of estranged communities, scattered feudal strongholds representing some (but by no means all) minority positions. Avant-garde film, for instance, has so far made few inroads in this area, sometimes for understandable reasons but sometimes due to ignorance or inertia. The growing popularity of some non-narrative tapes—ranging from rock videos to 'wallpaper' videos (four hours of fish swimming in a tank or a fire in a fireplace to soothe the nerves)—may even be taking some of the edge off the avant-garde, weaving its transgressions into the texture of everyday banality.

On the other hand, at a shop in New York called New Video, one can rent or purchase tapes of films by Mark Rappaport, Sara Driver, Jim Jarmusch, Yvonne Rainer, Richard Foreman, Jonas Mekas and Ken Jacobs. I bought a vcr last summer, and while I may be years behind some of my European friends with video recorders, I already have vhs copies of *Ballet Mécanique*, *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie*, *Enthusiasm*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Ordet*, *Playtime* and *Ugetsu Monogatari*, which



Above: *The Brother from Another Planet*. John Sayles 'could not afford to pay his own guild-mandated salary.' Below: *The Terminator*. Man (Arnold Schwarzenegger) as machine.



are invaluable to me as a teacher and critic. *Playtime* with its wings clipped for a video format is hardly the whole film, but it is still a useful reference tool. In the United States now, it is, significantly, easier to acquire *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* with correctly timed colour on videotape than on film.

At the same time, it's clear to me that my videotape library radically alters the impact and meaning of the films in my possession. Some of the pleasures afforded by the original films are no longer available, while others are available for the first time, such as the Barthesian pleasure of scanning or skipping through a text with a fast-forward button. The big question is whether, once the unattainable text becomes attainable, we learn anything crucial about it that we didn't know before. I'm not sure that we do: but, on the other hand, once this new power is put to use by artists and critics working directly on video—artists and critics who address themselves to the parameters of

this new form of pleasure—new forms of knowledge may well become possible.

Even now, video recorders open the way to creating new texts by intercutting between old texts, and I suspect

The unique capacity of video is to make the work mortal and immortal at the same time

that in the years ahead this option may create a new genre of intertextual *bricolage*. Indeed, we already have the phenomenon of the 'found footage' film, a genre of the avant-garde stretching from Joseph Cornell to Bruce Connor to Ken Jacobs that has more recently been taken up by everyone from Orson Welles (*F for Fake*) to Edgardo Cozarinsky (*La Guerre d'un Seul Homme*), from Raul Ruiz (*Petit Manuel d'Histoire de France*)

to Ken Russell (*The Planets*), from Woody Allen (*What's Up, Tiger Lily?*) to Carl Reiner (*Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*). Collectively, these films propose a sort of anti-Bazinian, Vertovian revolution whereby *découpage* replaces *mise en scène* and the director's chair makes way for the editing bench—a movement that can only gain in intensity as it falls within the potential grasp of everyone with a VCR.

Video technology takes a public art like cinema off the streets and places it on the shelf for private consumption. It answers the need of the son of Dr Mabuse in Lang's last film by facilitating the form of one-way, involuntary communication which we call surveillance. It even combines these two functions in a sense when it turns us into active voyeurs rather than passive spectators of art. To think about contemporary video technology—which includes laser discs, high-definition video, Advent screens, image processors and all the rest—is to think about armaments and weaponry. The pause button on a VCR confers some of the power of a trigger—the power to stop something or someone dead in its tracks—even if the pause button has an additional capacity which the trigger does not of bringing the dead back to life again. And when we stockpile films on cassette the way that countries stockpile weapons or computers stockpile information, what does this do to the word-of-mouth communication we associate with public forms like theatre and cinema? The unique capacity of video is to make the work mortal and immortal at the same time, a form of survival through mutation—or death through embalment.

The nature of our *desire* in relation to films is undergoing a subtle yet radical change. Expressions of that change are visible everywhere: in the narrative crisis posed by *Dune* and *The Cotton Club*, in the possession of the film text made possible by cassettes, and in the contradictory optimism and pessimism of a film like *Room 666*, which evokes an impossible transcultural blend of Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and a *table ronde* in *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

To understand the present American climate, one should look at a recent Hollywood film, *The Terminator*, which gives full expression to two important facets of this new desire: namely, the desire to be a machine, preferably a computer, and the anticipation of a holocaust as the prerequisite for a plausible happy ending. The surprising thing about *The Terminator* is how fundamentally cheerful it seems, given what it has to say. When the computer-villain (Arnold Schwarzenegger) has to decide how to respond verbally to someone pounding at his door, and a printout of the choices appears in his brain (and ours), the moment is an epiphany of delighted identification; we'd all love to have our own creative decisions broken down so succinctly. Imagine a remake of *Alphaville* with

Alpha-60 as the hero—an Alpha-60 who has absorbed and refined both the brutality of Lemmy Caution and the iconography of Schwarzenegger—and you have a new form of utopian, neo-Sternbergian erotics, shared equally by *Blade Runner*, which views the present both as a sordid, densely claustrophobic jungle and as a desirable place to be.

Ruiz, of course, is a phenomenon conceivable only outside the United States

Ruiz, in his very different fashion, expresses some aspect of the same desire, rerouted through leftist politics—although for him, as for Godard, the computer-hero is replaced by the myth or the metaphysical system. The recurring image in at least three of his works (*Utopia*, *Colloque de Chiens* and *Le Borgne*) of a corpse cut into pieces which are buried in diverse hidden locations is a precise metaphor for Ruiz's own oeuvre and his sense of his own scattered authorship. Ruiz, of course, is a phenomenon conceivable only outside the US—which helps to explain why his films still have had no appreciable stateside impact. Significantly, it was Ian Christie, Paul Taylor and Nigel Algar of the BFI who enabled me to see about a dozen of his tapes and films last summer. Trying to explain to American spectators the cultural system that makes a Ruiz possible would be a formidable task, and it's hard to determine even where such a discussion could take place.

During my own utopian reveries, I sometimes wonder what it would be like to see Ruiz's half-hour short *Le Jeu de l'Oie* or Straub-Huillet's *En Rachâchant* on an American cable channel like BRAVO. Some of the obstacles which prevent this may eventually prove to be more apparent than real. Over the past year, at least four so-called 'difficult' features—Maurizio Nichetti's *Ratataplan*, Samuel Fuller's *White Dog*, Jerry Lewis' *Smorgasbord* (retitled *Cracking Up*) and John Jeremy's *The Long Night of Lady Day*—premiered in the US on cable without any sort of theatrical release, conveniently bypassing the almost certain mauling and misapprehension most of them would have encountered from the press, and thereby reaching audiences more directly and without interference. On a much more modest yet I believe related level, it was possible last year to book a print of Ruiz's *Le Toit de la Baleine* for a film and photography conference at the university where I teach. That virtually no one on campus had heard of Ruiz didn't prevent a sizable crowd from turning up, given the context in which the film was shown. While responses were mixed, one could argue that the absence of media fanfare again proved more of an incentive than a deterrent. If

this means the end of film criticism, let me rephrase Godard—I await the end of film criticism with optimism.

Cable is offering a good deal already, which makes one optimistic about it opening up further. While the best film channels like BRAVO and Z aren't available everywhere—in Santa Barbara I can't get the latter and New Yorkers can't get either, but people in Los Angeles can get both—the monthly offerings are still impressive. This year alone (I write in early spring), BRAVO has already shown films by Bergman, Bertolucci, Buñuel, Fassbinder, Fellini, Forsyth, Greenaway, Herzog, Kurosawa, Max Ophüls, Resnais, Saura, Syberberg, Truffaut and Welles, among many others; SPN has offered films by Griffith, Lang and Murnau; the Disney Channel has just concluded *Monsieur Verdoux* and *A King in New York*, and even American Movie Classics offered good prints of *Rio Bravo* and the original *Scarface*. In most cases, the films are shown complete and without interruption. BRAVO precedes each film with a mild but usually not unintelligent critical introduction, and shows virtually every foreign film in both subtitled and dubbed versions. It's encouraging to hear that the subtitled versions are watched more often.

At the moment a critic becomes a star, the critical discourse becomes a nightclub act

We all know that certain difficult films can reach their audiences only by word of mouth, and it is here that cable may have more of a future than theatrical showings. In the cinemas today, word of mouth is probably more hampered than helped by the press, because the language of popular criticism usually offers too debased a model. (At the

moment a critic becomes a star, the critical discourse becomes a nightclub act.) Teaching film criticism workshops, I've met an increasing number of students who assume (from the evidence of their first papers) that film criticism is a form of advertising, to be written in the kind of aggressive jargon that deals only in superlatives and ultimate categories—a jargon where 'all time' invariably becomes the equivalent of 'yesterday'. Yet considering what they have been exposed to on network TV, and in newspapers, weeklies and non-academic film magazines, how could one realistically expect them to assume anything else?

On the other hand, in universities and among friends who have access to cable and/or collect cassettes—that is to say, in the more private and less ostentatious sectors—people are often finding it easier to deal with difficult or marginal films and discuss them without having to depend upon the beneficence of a Canby, Corliss, Denby, Kael or Hoberman. It isn't these critics but the positions they occupy which ultimately limit our choices, and these positions are created in turn by the pressures and cost of opening a film theatrically in New York. (It costs a sobering \$40,000 now to launch any feature there on a single-screen basis.)

The growth of multiplex cinemas in places like Toronto and Los Angeles allows for wider programming, and arts centres from Buffalo to Minneapolis to San Francisco bring in still more. But it's chiefly cable and academic film studies that are beginning to redistribute the exclusive power and influence held until now by New York a little more equitably around North America, and in productive and unpredictable ways. It's the Midwestern film departments which dominate much of the important work being done in film theory and film history, for instance; and at the Toronto Festival of Festivals last September, there was a strong movement afoot to liberate the Canadian avant-garde from

Another cultural system: Raul Ruiz's *La Ville des Pirates*.



its position as an American colony—a parallel to certain developments in the British avant-garde over a decade ago.

But cable and academic film study are both limited insofar as they still most often traffic in the already known, and the conservatism of most film criticism now is that it effectively does the same. One direct result of this current crisis in communication caused by 'communications' is that we don't really know as much as we should about the kinds of film-making that are going on around us. For this reason, I feel myself in conflict with those critics writing from institutional bases who've indicated that 1984 was a bad year—or a good year—for films in general. My conflict is not that I disagree but that I can't see how any of us as critics or programmers are in a position where we could possibly know something like that.

It's here that institutional power becomes most sinister, asserting critical notions and structures of closure rather than open forums and open texts. No matter how many films we see, we're only glimpsing a tip of the iceberg and often misreading the tip that we *do* see; I don't think we're necessarily much better than our predecessors in this respect. Without the benefit of word-of-mouth communication of the sort we had in the 60s—which was a time when the media was both less monolithic and less trusted, and when not only could a student uprising in New York help

spark off a much bigger one in Paris, but a film like *La Chinoise* could help spark off both—we can no longer assume that most of the best and most relevant work is automatically finding its way to our doorsteps. The media has to assume this in order to predict its own credibility; but this doesn't oblige us to assume it as well.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of maverick triumphs around, with varying degrees of visibility. These are scattered phenomena, not symptoms that can easily be packaged into any particular trend—although it might be noted that many of these works presuppose a certain sophistication about filmgoing as a conscious activity. *Choose Me* demonstrates for the first time that the formal play with parameters of acting and fiction found in Rivette is translatable, up to a point, into a popular and accessible Hollywood comedy. *Chain Letters* proves that the lighting and colour coding of a *Written on the Wind* are attainable without a Hollywood budget, while *1984* confirms the lesson already imparted by Olaf Stapledon in the 30s—that science fiction with literary depth is fundamentally grounded in an acute sense of the present as a particular time and place—with location ingenuity often taking the place of 'production value' expenditures.

Given the post-narrative, post-critical, post-auteurist and post-cinematic climate I've been describing, it's hard to

generalise about the directions in which audience tolerance is headed; too many coexisting time scales and patterns of development cloud the issue. While *Stranger than Paradise* popularises the avant-garde's use of black leader in a musical manner that audiences find pleasurable, avant-garde film-makers such as Leslie Thornton still have to remove all black leader even from extracts of their work in order to get it shown on the so-called educational tv networks in the States. (It has been argued that black leader is read by most tv viewers as a transmission problem, and it must be admitted that it registers quite differently on film and on video.)

Maybe in five or ten years we'll have complete films or tapes by Thornton, Rivette, Duras, Ruiz, Wenders, Jancsó and Straub-Huillet on American cable and/or cassettes—and maybe we won't. I'm convinced that the audience is there as well as the technology; all that's needed at this point is mending a few loose cultural connections and giving it a chance. The same holds for non-theatrical distribution on college campuses—or, indeed, anywhere where the life expectancy of a work doesn't have to depend entirely on the enthusiasm of a mainstream critic. ■

An earlier version of the above was presented as a lecture at the Rotterdam Film Festival's Market in January. The author's thanks to Hubert Bals and Edward Branigan.

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Cannes

1

Penelope Houston

For several days at Cannes, the BBC man who had had the singular forethought to pack his galoshes must have been the envy of the Croisette. It was that sort of festival: dominated too much by the weather, too little by the films, with an edgy feeling even to the sideshows. Among these was the curious episode of the custard-pie, pressed ever so gently against Godard's face by a man who, eyewitnesses reported, hardly broke his stride to make the silly gesture. An art terrorist group later 'claimed responsibility'; also on their pie list, it seems, is Marguerite Duras.

Clint Eastwood blocked one or two unexpected bumpers during the *Pale Rider* press conference. Otherwise, he risked having only garlands pressed on him, as the chosen few were shepherded on pilgrimages, otherwise known as interviews, to his yacht, while rain-coated crowds gawped from the harbour wall. Cannes has entirely abandoned its former rather lordly attitude to stars: it needs them badly. Just as, this year, it decided to face economic realities about cinema in the 80s with a selection of films in the main auditorium of which some fifty per cent either hailed from Hollywood or had major American elements in theme and casting (Nicolas Roeg's *Insignificance*, the British entry) or in direction (Paul Schrader's *Mishima*). An Americanised festival is a recognition of where things stand; which didn't prevent a certain European tetchiness.

The jury, who handed out prizes with the abandon of lollipops, may have been rooting for Europe when they chose the Yugoslav *Daddy's on a Business Trip* for the Grand Prix. Or they could have reached the kind of procedural impasse resolved only by picking a film on which they could agree not to disagree. Emir Kusturica's film is about the period, as the director describes it, 'when people belonging to the Yugoslavian Secret Service, opposed to Stalinism, themselves made mistakes.' Father's business trip is actually a stretch of forced labour, after he is denounced by a relative. No neighbour wants to mention him, or enquire after his whereabouts, for fear of drawing unwanted attention to himself, and the story is observed through the eyes of the prisoner's son, a stolid little boy whose mother, whatever the hardships of her plight, manages to dress both her sons in the most smart and pristine of raincoats. The film is alert, amiable and well enough done; but not really the stuff of which grand prix winners are made.

The first film I saw at Cannes was

Godard's *Détective*. It didn't make too much impact. A week later, it loomed larger in one's mind—an experience other people seemed to share. The reason, I suspect, is that much of the intervening week had been spent watching directors filming scripts, with varying degrees of capability. The films' components could be sorted out; points could be awarded or taken away, if one had a mind to it, for *mise en scène*, performance, dialogue and so on. But with Godard, take it or leave it, the language is cinema, welded together and irreducible. Set in a large, vaguely American hotel, *Détective* is 'about', as we're told, 'A woman, two men, a love story, a murder, a boxing match, the mafia...' It's also 'about' a deafening, often brilliant soundtrack, a marvellous moment with three billiard balls, the usual quotations and glimpses of book titles, good jokes and bad jokes, a surveillance camera, a towering pile of *série noire* novels, a dazzling moment with a waiter who intrudes not only into the conversation but into the shot, a ridiculous incantation (only Godard could think that boxers might still be called 'Tiger Jones'), the precise weight on the screen of Alain Cuny's appearance as an ageing godfather... It's not nearly enough, certainly, but there are moments when Godard, without even seeming to try, still makes the screen

vibrate. And there's the nostalgia, in 1985, for a time when films like this seemed to have a future as well as a past.

There's nothing in *Détective* of the bitterness which usually catches up with middle-aged nonconformists. François Truffaut went the other way, from iconoclast to icon, and paid the other way, with our gradual realisation that he would hardly be capable of *surprising* us again. But we all grew up, fondly, with Truffaut, and it was the growing-up of Truffaut, or the surrogate characters in his films, that made a loose linking theme for the festival's tribute film, *Vivement Truffaut*. The film itself, perhaps hastily made, is a rather ordinary assembly of clips and interview material, oddly omitting the surely crucial *L'Enfant Sauvage* but compensating with a liberal slice of *La Chambre Verte*, a film which I suspect may grow with the years. But the brief stage ceremony, supervised in exemplary fashion by Jeanne Moreau, a scarlet-coated whipper-in for the Truffaut actors as they moved into a slowly spreading circle of light, was simple, affecting and not at all the usual dutiful gesture. The crowd outside the Palais was enormous; perhaps largely drawn by the lure of seeing Moreau, Deneuve, Léaud, Ardant and the rest of the 'family'. Truffaut, as a true man of the cinema, would not have minded that.

Remembering Truffaut: Jean-Claude Brial, Brigitte Fossey, Fanny Ardant, Jacqueline Bisset, Isabelle Adjani, Jeanne Moreau, Catherine Deneuve, Jean-Pierre Léaud.





Dim Sun: Kim Chew.



Daddy's on a Business Trip.

André Téchiné's *Rendez-vous*, about a girl from the provinces barging about Paris, managed to be at once flabby and flashy. It won the prize for direction, a word which clearly means different things to different people. I much preferred Raymond Depardon's *A Woman in Africa* (a late title change, it seemed, from the more apposite *Empty Quarter*), in the 'Un Certain Regard' section. In theory, and sometimes in practice, this is a film with practically nothing going for it. A Frenchman, at a loose end in a Red Sea port, picks up a no less aimless woman. Together they meander about Africa, by train and landrover and boat, while his cool commentary analyses an obsessive relationship of sorts. The man remains unseen (except for one not very prepossessing shot); the woman stands around, while he talks about her. When their landrover gets stuck in the desert, she is seen making feeble efforts to dig it out, while he comments that at night the sand will cool and harden and they will be able to drive away. Cut to another location; the adventure was as footling as it seemed. If one finds the film mildly compelling, it may be a personal weakness for such throwbacks to the mooning, sub-Antonioni movies of the 60s. Or the combination of the question marks and hesitations of the narrative with the forward momentum of the stunningly shot journey, the look of an African township, street by street, through a train window.

The acting prize had seemed nailed down for Klaus-Maria Brandauer in István Szabó's *Colonel Redl*, though in fact it went elsewhere. Brandauer's performance, with its flexibility, control and sheer intelligence, certainly confirms his standing as one of the major European actors of his generation. The film, which stresses that it's only one reading ('a product of our imagination, inspired by history') of the events which also yielded John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* (acknowledged in the credits), is as elegantly made as might be expected. Redl, self-made soldier from a poor family, homosexual, *arriviste*, is the classic outsider, the man who thinks he's playing a winning hand until the cards turn and he's handed a revolver and committed to a lonely and desperately

reluctant suicide. Szabó shows the empty colonel as a victim less of Hapsburg scheming than of himself, and begins with a schoolboy Redl ingratiating himself with the aristocrats he will need, use, betray and be betrayed by. If one feels slightly lukewarm about a film which knows precisely where it's going, it is because we have been hereabouts before, and Szabó takes a slightly excessive two and a half hours to reach the pre-ordained destination.

The Japanese film in competition, the late Shuji Terayama's *Farewell to the Ark*, is set in one of those villages which exist, one hopes, only as settings for films. It would be alarming to think that, on the other side of the economic miracle, there's actually a bucolic existence in which villagers are hauling their old people up mountains, communing feverishly with nature, peering into mysterious holes in the ground (there's a particularly good hole in this film) or, as here, taking their time from the one clock left to them, all other time-pieces having been summarily jettisoned. Terayama's last film is characteristically farouche, but broken-winded.

Altogether more engaging, and recognisable, was Juzio Itami's *The Funeral*, which could be (roughly) described as by Ozu out of Altman. A Japanese actor (in commercials, that is) discovers with some dismay that he is required to preside over his father-in-law's obsequies, a three-day ceremony governed by the strictest conventions. As he and the family try to pick up tips on funeral etiquette from an instructional videotape, cope with a priest who drives up in a white Rolls, evidently the spoils of many such occasions, ponder the delicate question of the precise alignment of the corpse, the film is often maliciously funny. There's a wonderful shot, tracking along a row of back-sides and twitching, shifting feet, which breaks a hitherto carefully guarded secret: squatting for long periods is as uncomfortable for the Japanese as for anyone else. But Itami is not so crass as to turn a funeral into a farce, and the Ozu echoes, particularly when the widow finally asserts herself, hold the film in a delicate balance. Itami is a newcomer to direction though not to

films; he has been an actor for twenty-odd years and has also written, one's enchanted to learn, a book called *Diary of Boring Days in Europe*.

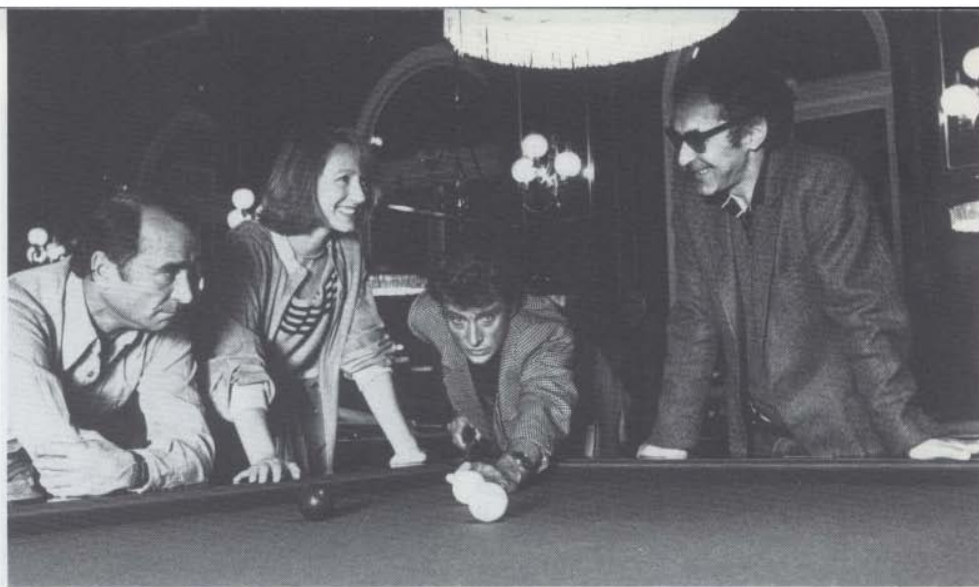
Wayne Wang's small and appetising *Dim Sun*, also shown in the Directors' Fortnight, has Ozu's influence written all over it (and obliquely acknowledged); a nice bit of cultural cross-breeding from the Japanese master to the young Hong Kong-born film-maker. The film is about a Chinese-American mother and daughter—the latter easily Americanised, the former a stubborn but genial traditionalist—with a friendly uncle figure hovering to help. The camera squats at Ozu-level to observe the meals prepared and eaten in solitude, the empty rooms with the curtains blowing, the backdoor chats (unsubtitled) between Chinese neighbours. The touch may not be always quite sure, but the sensibility is sympathetic; a friendly, modest film, improbably but resiliently gentle, it might seem, for an American product of the 80s.

From Argentina, Luis Puenzo's *The Official Version* confronts the problem of the *desaparecidos* (the missing ones), the people on the nation's conscience who slipped out of sight during the military regime. A woman history teacher begins to wonder about the true identity of her beloved adopted daughter, follows up clues, rattles enough skeletons to destroy the self-assured existence in which she had taught by the book and believed it. Stylistically, the film makes no great impact (the director's previous experience, it seems has been in commercials, and sometimes it shows), but as a document from a country trying to set itself to rights it's impressive; as is the performance of Norma Aleandro as the conscience-stricken pedagogue.

Three disappointments, in assorted styles, need noting because of the names attached to them. Dusan Makavejev, the footloose Yugoslav, has surfaced in Australia with *The Coca-Cola Kid*, an odd sort of film, though not exactly the sort of oddity which might have been predicted from Makavejev, which has apparently had a slightly chequered production history. The story is the one about the efficient young American, stuffed to the gills with slogans about

correct company practices, who arrives to sort out the outback and ends up more human, perhaps wiser, and considerably less efficient. Eric Roberts is Coca-Cola's man in Australia, Bill Kerr the cantankerous old-timer who has cornered the local market with his home brews, and Greta Scacchi the girl in the case. The film is not without its genial moments, including a splendidly abrupt appearance by a camel and its rider, but overall it's as sloppy as a baggy suit of clothes.

Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* remains one of the key documents of the 1960s. Now this infrequent feature film-maker is haranguing us about American policy towards Nicaragua via *Latino*, in which two Vietnam veterans are despatched to Honduras to train with the Contra rebels. One of them develops a conscience—no wonder, since the Contras are shown as up to most of the atrocities in the book, shooting prisoners in the back and the like, while the Sandinistas orate nobly at funerals. The film's argument would be better served, I feel, without this insistent reliance on the crushing tactics of overkill. And there is overkill of quite another kind in *Le Soulier de Satin*, the veteran Manoel de Oliveira's adaptation of Paul Claudel's Catholic epic of the sixteenth century. The film, running some two-and-three-quarter hours, is apparently only a slice of a six-hour TV mini-series, a formidable cultural venture with backing from INA in Paris, German and Swiss television companies and the Portuguese Institute of Cinema.



Déetective: Claude Brasseur, Nathalie Baye, Johnny Hallyday, Godard.

In set-ups running up to fifteen minutes, a game but overtaxed cast monotonously declaims Claudel's lines, in *tableaux* not so much *vivants* as *glacés*. There is undoubtedly something heroic about such an undertaking, but even the staunchest quailed as hours in the cinema seemed to pass like weeks. I left at the point where Philip of Spain put in an appearance, wearing what it was impossible not to think of as a small but costly crown, plotting to substitute a ringer for Mary Queen of Scots. Perhaps the oddest thing about the film is that it has been taken up by the Cannon Group, who have now topped this by announcing a *King Lear* to be directed by Godard. Wonders will never cease.

Finally, *Le Temps Détruit*, which was

shown on the VE Day anniversary. Directed by Pierre Beuchot, this is basically a newsreel compilation from the first months of the war, with a commentary quoting from letters by three French soldiers killed during the fighting in 1940. One of them was the director's father; another was the composer Maurice Jaubert (*L'Atalante*, etc), whose music echoes again over the waterways of France. I was slightly (perhaps unworthily) suspicious about the provenance of a few of the newsreel shots, but much of the material is remarkably vivid and unhackneyed. However often the archives are ransacked, it seems that there is always something new, valid and affecting to be found. □

Cannes

2

Richard Roud

Two of the best films I saw at Cannes were out of competition, and each, in its own way, was a surprise. I am not a Woody Allen fan: there is something about his persona, nay, his very person, that I find unappealing. But *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, partly because he is not in it, was both ingenious and enjoyable. As everyone at Cannes was saying, it was much more Pirandellian in spirit (indeed, an Italian told me, it borrowed a line from *Six Characters in Search of an Author*) than Monicelli's lacklustre version of Pirandello's novel *The Late Mathias Pascal*. I imagine Allen's inspiration came from *Sherlock Junior*, in which Buster Keaton, as a projectionist, succeeds in walking on to the screen and becoming part of a film.

Here, more intriguingly, it is an actor in a film (Jeff Daniels) who, noticing that a woman in the audience (Mia Farrow) has seen the picture five times in a row, decides to come down from the

screen and talk to her. Although non-plussed, she is thrilled. The other actors, however, are furious. They don't know what to do and sit around trying to talk him into coming back. But he won't, and Mia Farrow, who is broke (this is the Depression) and married to a creep, is all too happy to keep him company. But when news gets back to Hollywood all hell breaks loose, and the actor (also, of course, Jeff Daniels) is sent to New Jersey to persuade the character he is playing to resume his place in the film.

Mia Farrow gives a remarkable performance, pitiful but not maudlin; Jeff Daniels, a magnificent specimen of the early 30s, cleverly differentiates between the character and the actor (though is it really a double role?); and Gordon Willis' camerawork is, as usual, exemplary. The highest tribute, however, came from people leaving the cinema: 'What a shame it wasn't longer.' And that's not a remark one ever

hears at the Cannes Film Festival.

My other favourite was Joseph Losey's *Steaming*. Much as I have usually admired Losey's work, I couldn't help wondering why this film, based on Nell Dunn's play, had not come out earlier. It was finished before Losey died last June (he supervised everything but the laying of the music track), and I thought it had been held up because the producers felt it was not too good. It is, however, very good, and was rapturously received. Losey's widow Patricia, who wrote the screenplay, believed the producers were worried because so many of the men associated with the production found this all-women film a little disturbing. Even Losey himself murmured one day: 'Why do they say these terrible things about men?' The cast, however, carried all before it: Vanessa Redgrave, Sarah Miles, Diana Dors, Brenda Bruce and a newcomer, Patti Love, who was more than able to hold her own. One

signal achievement, it seems to me, was that Patricia Losey resisted all temptations to open out the play. The Turkish baths where the action occurs (Porchester Hall, reconstructed in the studio) is a sanctum, a place where women can really communicate with each other, where all social barriers are down. To have shown them elsewhere would have been wholly wrong.

I had looked forward to *Mishima* chiefly because I felt that both the right-wing writer, who was the subject of the film, and the director, Paul Schrader, were men whose work tends to fanatical excess, and that the combination might have struck sparks. Unfortunately, it did not. Schrader, however, worked under great constraints; and the press-book bears a bizarre disclaimer: 'Yukio Mishima is acknowledged to have been a real person (sic), but his acts have been fictionalised by writers. Other persons and events are fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons and events is unintentional.' One can smell the lawyers behind that, and indeed Mishima's formidable widow is said to disapprove of the film.

I do not know her reasons, but mine are that there is nothing here to make one believe it is about a great writer. Mishima comes over as a boring narcissist and more than a little simple-minded. The film is, however, very ingeniously structured, as its defenders kept pointing out. We start with the last day of Mishima's life, told chronologically, but interrupted with black and white flashbacks which reveal his past, and episodes from three of his novels which are supposed to reveal his interior imaginative world. Schrader says that 'at the moment of Mishima's death, you see how each of his novels—his fantasies—ends.' This was by no means clear to me.

Mishima won a prize for its 'artistic contributions', but the much-praised sets by a famous Japanese designer looked to me like Selfridge's window when they do a Japanese fortnight. Roy Scheider, as the English narrator, is unconvincing and his voice is virtually unrecognisable. On the other hand, Philip Glass' almost Wagnerian music is most effective.

The new Chabrol was unintentionally sabotaged by the transmission the night before on television of *Violette Nozière*. Compared with that film, *Poulet au Vinaigre*, while eminently watchable, seemed a pale shadow. The title, by the way, is a pun. There is indeed a chicken dish with a sauce using vinegar, but 'poulet' is also slang for policeman, and, as played by Jean Poiret, this detective is sharply acid. The plot is a shade predictable: three beastly bourgeois are trying to take away the house of a paralysed woman (Stéphane Audran) and her son; their attempt to make a profitable real-estate deal is, however, finally foiled. The son and his girlfriend are both uninteresting and both inadequate.

Everyone expected the new Kurosawa, *Ran* (meaning 'Chaos' and based on *King*



Poulet au Vinaigre: Jean Poiret, Lucas Delvaux.

Lear), to turn up, but, unhappily, it was not ready. And the Chris Marker film, *A.K.*, about the shooting of *Ran*, was insufficient compensation. The festival closed with John Boorman's *The Emerald Forest*, based on an apparently true story about the son of a construction engineer who is kidnapped by some Stone Age Amazon Indians called the Invisible People (their rivals are the Ferocious People). When the father (Powers Boothe) finally after ten years tracks down the boy (the director's son, Charley Boorman), he is told that the young man has no intention of returning to what is laughingly called civilisation. The film has some ecological pretensions, but we are a long way from the golden days of *Point Blank*, *Leo the Last* and even *Deliverance*—closer in fact to *Hell in the Pacific*. The bona fide Boormanites liked it, but hardly, it appeared, anyone else.

Wim Wenders turned up out of competition with *Tokyo-ga*. The title translates as 'Subject: Tokyo', but that is not the whole story. It is also a homage to Yasujiro Ozu, sequences from whose *Tokyo Story* begin and end the film. (Strange to think that, thanks to Derek

Prouse and Mme Kawakita, London discovered Ozu at the NFT in 1956, about two decades before the French, who always pride themselves on being ahead of everybody else, began to realise that here was one of the world's great filmmakers.) There are deeply moving interviews with Ozu's favourite actor, Chishu Ryu, and his lifelong cameraman who demonstrates exactly how Ozu wanted the camera placed and how he firmly resisted any suggestion that he should use anything but the 50mm lens he always used in all his films.

For me these were the most compelling sequences, but they are cleverly interspersed with views of Tokyo today, which looks all too different from the world of Ozu. There is even an interview with Werner Herzog on top of Tokyo's 'Eiffel Tower' discussing the problems of putting the reality of Tokyo today on the screen. And then we see Ozu's grave. At Rotterdam this year, Bernardo Bertolucci told us how he went to look for Ozu's final resting place and was told by Mme Kawakita that not only would it be difficult to find but that there was nothing on it. He discovered that what she meant was not that the grave was unmarked, but rather that it was engraved with the Chinese ideogram 'Mu' which means . . . nothing, the void. Here now is the gravestone: a moving and appropriate image.

Victor Nunez's *A Flash of Green* is based on a novel by John D. McDonald, but this was not played up in the publicity since the novel is not one of the Travis McGee series and the director did not want people to think they were going to see a thriller. In fact, it is a thriller, but without a detective. Ed Harris, surely one of today's best 'new' actors, is superb, as is the whole cast in this story of real-estate corruption in a Florida town. For my money, this is an immense step forward from Nunez's first feature, *Gal Young Un*; it has the odd *longueur*, but remains consistently gripping. Nunez is, undoubtedly, a name to watch: my Cannes prediction for this year. ■

Steaming: Vanessa Redgrave, Sarah Miles.



The Department of Film
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
TRADITIONS



'THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII'

Part Two of the retrospective BRITISH FILM
is on view through 1986 in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

This exhibition is presented by the Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with The National Film Archive, British Film Institute, London, on the occasion of their 50th anniversaries.

Sponsored by Pearson and Goldcrest Films and Television, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Roy and Niuta Titus Fund, and the British Council, London.

GERMANY:

a neverending story

In these days of telecommunication booms and transatlantic fare wars, it is all too easy for Americans to forget just how far away Europe is and what that distance means for the European film business. It wasn't until I made my way to Germany, for example, that I found I was going to have problems writing about the film industry there because—in the words of one top Munich producer—'There is no German film industry.' He cited lack of raw materials like stars and screenplays, inadequate production facilities, small audiences and no money. 'If you want to hear about the German film,' a distributor at Paramount's Munich office added, 'go

back to New York—they talk about it more there than they do here.'

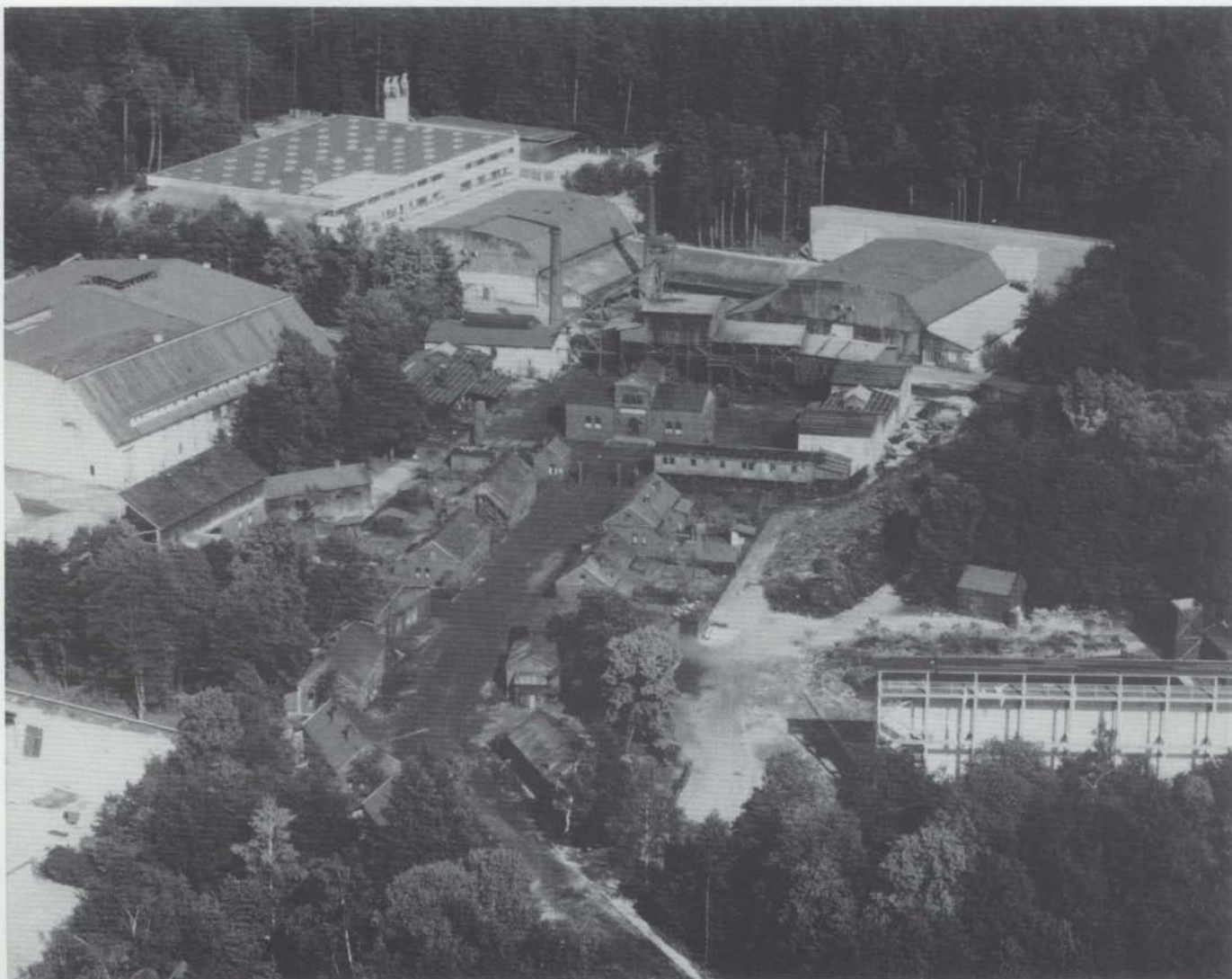
Perhaps so. But when Americans speak about the German cinema, they usually refer to the likes of Fassbinder,

William Fisher

Wenders and Herzog—the great names of the 70s—whose work welled from a unique confluence of cultural and economic fortuities that is now a mere

trickle. American observers still tend to believe in an imaginary state-subsidised cultural utopia that spontaneously generates oblique narratives with heady, symbolic visuals. A lot has happened in the last few years. Fassbinder has been gone from the scene for some time. Wenders these days works everywhere but in West Germany. Herzog has appeared on the David Letterman show, blowing the high-priest cover that the media and fans had created for him. And the federal film subsidy programmes have become a thorn in the side of the Christian-Democrat administration of Helmut Kohl. The news that the state of things

Bavaria Studios: Dream Factory on the Isar.



has changed is just beginning to get around in the Federal Republic of Germany itself. That the West German film is still anything but big business at home or abroad is something of which no one in the Munich and Berlin film communities needs to be reminded.

The current problem is the same one that the Germans have been trying to solve for four decades. How to create a film that is distinctively German but still appeals to an international audience? Unfortunately, it's not simply a question of coming up with the right screenplay. There's the problem of finding the people and money to develop that winning combination; there's the problem of gaining access to those audiences abroad; there's the language problem. And, finally, the biggest problem of all—what is 'German' anyway? Although that should hardly be a problem for a country with such a rich and dramatic cultural history, it's a question that has no unequivocal answer—especially for the German film, which has had to repudiate much of its past and accept all too much of foreign origin in the last forty years. Consider for a moment that, at any given time, an overwhelming majority of motion picture screens in the Federal Republic are showing American films. And that nearly all those films are dubbed into German.

That has had a queer effect on movie audiences, and ultimately on the entire national film culture. It's an effect one immediately notices, for example, when a popular American film like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* plays in a German theatre. It's a lesson in cultural anthropology to watch a German audience identify completely with the film's all-American protagonist (now speaking German) as he consistently bests the one-dimensionally evil and bumbling Nazis. That the latter, to this day, represent Germany in a Hollywood geo-political cosmology and cartoon version of history which has worldwide currency is a problem all but lost on the German postwar generations that have been marinated in American culture.

The task which such a film demands of 'becoming American' for two hours is easier for that audience than the task of sitting through the thorny, probing history lessons of a Straub or a Syberberg. Likewise, such American films as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* provide German film-makers with their only model for a distinctively nationalistic picture with international appeal. Individual films, box-office and export figures aside, these are the real crises of the German cinema.

From its beginnings, the German industry has been rocked by crises: the flight of its leading lights after the glorious days of the 20s, the lean Nazi years, the Second World War. Then the rebuilding period after the war under Allied supervision put the Germans at a disadvantage which they have never quite been able to overcome. Gearing back up with insufficient capital, they



Raiders of the Lost Ark: 'a lesson in cultural anthropology'.

were forced to concentrate on the home market, producing principally unexportable provincial musical comedies featuring beer and *Lederhosen* in Alpine landscapes. And, to the Germans' greatest detriment, the Americans strategically retained their hold on the channels of film distribution, thereby ensuring their direct control of the German market. During the late 50s, cinemas closed at the rate of one a day. By the 70s only one German distributor that did not have links with the American majors—Constantin Film—held any sort of market share. That was the troubled curtain raiser to the so-called New German Cinema.

The myth of its origins—a group of fledgling film-makers hurling down the gauntlet to the old guard at the Oberhausen Festival in 1962—has become something of a commonplace in chronicles of the German film. Likewise, many observers view the subsequent pieces of legislation for state support of film solely from the perspective of the film-makers: as an opportunity for creative self-development by Germany's young talent. From the standpoint of sceptical federal officials, however, those measures were intended to put the German cinema on the road towards self-sufficiency. The labyrinthine system of finance that sprang up—what one of the film-makers referred to as 'capitalism without money'—could just as well be termed 'socialism without consensus', for lack of funds was no less a problem than lack of unity among the film-makers and their lack of an audience.

That last problem can in large measure be blamed on the older German film establishment and their American partners who controlled access to the German cinemas. In an effort to get their own films into those cinemas, a group of young film-makers founded the Filmverlag der Autoren (Authors' Film Publisher) in 1971. The Filmverlag was able to attract and administer money for production, place the New German Film

in theatres at home and bring it to the attention of festivals, critics and commercial markets abroad. Although it was still outmuscled by American motion pictures at the German box-office, this compelling and by no means unified body of films had, quite quickly, put the Federal Republic back on the cultural map.

But that was back when Helmut Schmidt's Social Democrat party was sitting in Bonn. With a change in the political climate, with loss, defection and stagnation in its ranks, the German star fell as quickly as it had risen. And what that brief productive period bequeathed its heirs was a shambles. Whatever its accomplishments, the 'New German Film' had failed to develop a domestic or wide international market, and it had failed to raise the technical level of the industry.

Chancellor Kohl's Minister of the Interior, Friedrich Zimmermann, embodies the present administration's position on the German film: if it cannot stand on its own feet, if it cannot command an audience, in short, if it is not a good investment, it will have to go fish in the open seas of the free market. One of the many recent German film scandals occurred at the Federal Prize Awards ceremony at the 1983 Berlin Film Festival where Zimmermann lambasted Herbert Achternbusch's *The Ghost* because of its attack on 'religious principles held by a great many Germans.' In light of the strikingly reduced market share of the German film, Zimmermann fulminated, 'the whole idea of aid for film will have to be reconsidered.'

Zimmermann proposes that the benefits of the German film be reckoned not in terms of cultural value, but in marks and pfennigs. And that is a change which many Germans in the business of film welcome. Unlike its neighbours, France and Italy, however, Germany is not seeking its new fortunes through co-productions with its Common Market partners. It is looking instead to

no one other than its 'partner' in postwar reconstruction from across the Atlantic as investor and market—cynically stated, as patron—for the German film.

If a central issue of the 60s was getting German movies into German theatres, the issue of the 80s has been getting them into American theatres. And it is obvious why: with about 17,000 commercial screens in the US alone, more than half the world cinema market is located in North America. If the German film is to play for higher stakes, it can redeem its costs only with a successful showing there. In the eyes of the international film business—and especially of the Americans—these new plans for bigger productions and increased export give the German film community the aura of an upstart. Suddenly the Germans are no longer content to produce small, art films, but are aiming to make the German film competitive in the world market. And that is something the upper management of the American film business is not particularly keen on.

For although the North American market is the most lucrative, the European cinema market (of which Germany is a substantial part) is also very valuable. American films redeem almost 40 per cent of their production costs in Europe (while European films reclaim less than 10 per cent of theirs in the US). Curiously, although far and away world leader, the American film industry is dependent on foreign markets in a way that few other American industries are. But, dependent or not, the American distributors advantageously control the North American and European markets—and are not eager to give up that control.

They also like to set the ground rules for bringing foreign films into the United States. That generally means under the auspices of the big American distributors. And from their perspective, if anyone is going to make a profit from the American market, it's not going to be a group of foreigners. As a reward for picking up *The Boat* (*Das Boot*), for example, Columbia helped itself not only to a healthy box-office—\$3m profit for the first-run theatrical release alone—but also, as Frank Price, ex-studio head, claims, 'for the next 30, 40, 50 years we've got a picture that will be playing on Pay tv.' Apparently there is money to be made from the German film. All the Germans have to figure out is how to get a piece of it.

Germany's principal production facility is Bavaria Studios (otherwise known as the Dream Factory on the Isar River) just outside Munich. To finance a challenge to the Americans, the studio is looking to America itself for support: the Bavaria is now actively seeking to attract American productions both as customers for studio space and as co-producers and financiers for German projects. Management at the Bavaria, like many others in Germany, see American participation and investment as key for building up facilities, training technicians and keeping capital flowing.

Indeed, for *The NeverEnding Story* (a \$25m co-production with Warner Brothers) the Bavaria built a new studio and installed what is now the largest blue screen in the world.

'In terms of facilities and staff,' says Michael Röhrig, public relations chief at the studio, 'we have overtaken Cinecittà in Rome. And with our new emphasis on special effects we will soon top the British competition in that area.' Indeed, SFX ace Brian Johnson (Academy Award winner for *Alien* and *The Empire Strikes Back*) was one of the first Britons to jump ship, and has since become something of an in-house figure at the Bavaria with his work on *The NeverEnding Story* and other films. He is also contracted to direct two big-budget, special effects films for the studio, both of which are seeking American partners. The Bavaria's management makes no secret that this emphasis on special effects technology is an effort to lure American productions away from the costly effects studios in the States. And this appeal has already paid off in some measure. Among American productions recently at the Bavaria were Paul Mazursky's *Moscow on the Hudson* and George Roy Hill's *The Little Drummer Girl*. 'The fee for studio work on *Drummer Girl*,' adds Röhrig, 'was budgeted at a mere \$2m—and we came in under budget. We offer lower production costs, no unions, and the strength of the dollar against the mark.'

But although the Bavaria may be able to show its stockholders a better annual report this year, their programme is not without its consequences. Although prices may be lower compared to Southern California, the new American production activity, as Munich-based independent producer Barbara Moorsee claims, 'prices the Germans out of the market.' Fewer and fewer German productions can afford the services of the Dream Factory on the Isar. In effect, the American money coming into the Bavaria is hurting the German film

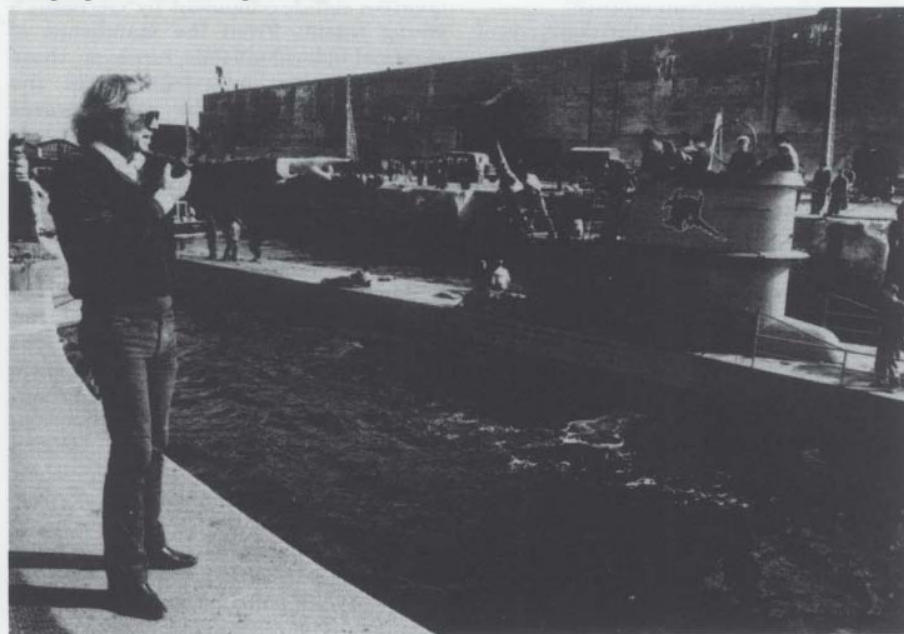
business as much as it helps. But the studio itself is still at a disadvantage for wooing American productions over to Southern Germany. According to Benno Novotny, in charge of foreign sales, 'We can't afford to keep an office open in New York or Los Angeles.'

Representation in the United States is the collective problem of everyone in Germany trying to get a piece of the American pie. Karl de Vogt, head of the Export Union of the German Film (an organisation he describes as 'Germany's MPEAA without money or Jack Valenti'), cites representation as his biggest problem as well. 'Although we have representatives in Paris, Rome, London, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Rio and Tokyo, we've never been able to find anyone in the US who has a good relationship with the majors and a good knowledge of distribution who would be willing to work for us. And if we could find him, we couldn't afford him.'

But it's not only prices that keep the German distributors out of the market. They argue that the business practices of the American distributors vis-à-vis foreign films constitute a subtle form of protectionism. For the American distributors—who have their own interests and bigger commitments to home-grown product—set stiff terms for foreign customers: ludicrously low minimum guarantees and notoriously small shares of any sort of ancillary profits. The situation, according to Günter Rohrbach, producer of *The Boat* and General Manager of Bavaria Studios, is 'like trying to export spaghetti to Italy.'

Unlike spaghetti, however, the German film can never be served up exactly like the genuine article. It will always appear foreign and, in the view of American distributors, will always be an acquired taste. Because they consider it 'strenuous' to read subtitles, American distributors promote foreign-language pictures as 'art' films targeted at small, select audiences who, in their view, value 'culture' above entertainment. As

Wolfgang Petersen filming *The Boat*.



those people go to those movies without much prodding anyway, the distributors reason, there is little need for an ambitious advertising campaign. Current Business Manager of the Filmverlag der Autoren, Hansjörg Kopp, points out that, 'The German film has been relegated to the classics departments of the majors or it becomes the business of the small distributors without muscle. They claim that experience bears them out: a foreign film that turns a profit in the States almost never does so for more than \$500,000. That, for example, is a minimum guarantee for almost any American film in Germany.'

If you can't beat the Americans, do business with them. That is the new game plan of, among others, the Filmverlag der Autoren and New Constantin Film (the contemporary counterpart of the only surviving German distributor of the postwar years), respectively the most high-profile and the most profitable of the German distributors. The Filmverlag has been moving in a conspicuously international and commercial direction since 1977, the year of its takeover by Rudolf Augstein, owner of *Der Spiegel*. Eager to increase their market share at home in a way they could not do with solely German fare, the new management decided to seek out an American partner. When the top management at United Artists left to found Orion Film in 1978, the Filmverlag jumped at the chance and signed aboard for two packages of eight and twelve pictures from the new 'mini-major' at the cost of what their head of foreign sales called 'a big heap of money'.

Another key American figure for Germany's distributors—and especially for New Constantin—is the Producers' Sales Organisation, another of the 'independent majors' that was founded in 1977 as a producers' rep and foreign sales organisation. They have brought Constantin such hits as *Never Say Never Again*, *The Day After* and the *Conan* films. Unlike Orion or any other big

American firm, pso has brought German films into the us—for example, *The Boat* and *The NeverEnding Story* were both 'hooked up' with American distributors or partners by pso. And on first glance, both those deals don't look too bad for the Germans. The critical and popular success of *The Boat*, along with six Oscar nominations, would seem to be a major achievement. *The NeverEnding Story* opened in the us with a remarkable 970 prints, and has grossed well over \$20m—both records not only for German films in the States, but for foreign pictures of any nationality.

On closer examination, however, the relationship appears somewhat less happy. pso struck a deal on *The Boat* with Triumph-Columbia—a division of Columbia that has come to specialise in (what many describe as 'one-way') partnerships with foreign concerns such as France's largest producer, Gaumont. Triumph-Columbia brought *The Boat* into 150 theatres in the us in its first run, put up a strong advertising campaign, and generally pushed the film sufficiently to bring it to the attention of the people who give out the Academy Awards. *The Boat's* six nominations can, in part, be attributed to the film's limited release in a dubbed English version. It seems that it's acceptable to dub a foreign film and sensible to advertise big-time when a major American studio has a vested interest in its success: in addition to American box-office, Columbia owned exclusive American and Canadian rights for tv, cable and video sales. It was a high price indeed that the Bavaria and New Constantin paid to get their picture into American theatres.

A similar one-sided partnership developed out of Filmverlag's relationship with Orion. Such 'packages' as the Filmverlag agreed to take from their American partner smack to some of the outlawed practice of 'block booking': presale of a group of films (often before production) at a reduced cost per picture,

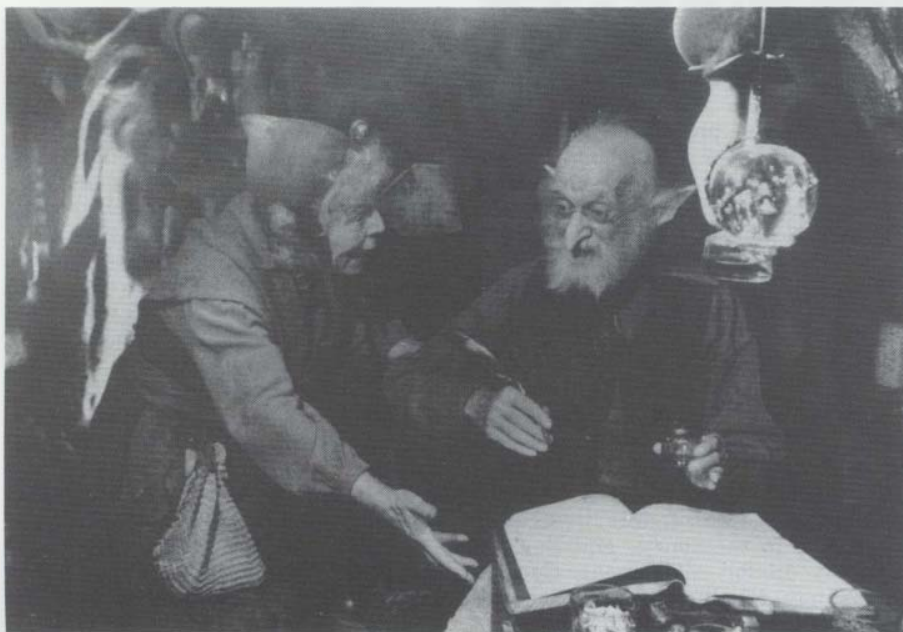
provided the buyer takes the entire offering. Although the Filmverlag's Business Manager Hansjörg Kopp wished to withhold comment on the profitability of the Orion packages until the last two films are released, he confided, 'We weren't the ones who came out on top of that deal.'

In 1926 ufa, the Berlin-based centre of the German film industry, decided to beat the Americans at their own game—the big-budget picture aimed at an international audience. They brought out the special effects blockbuster of the period, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The costly production was a disaster financially as well as critically, and brought the ufa studios and the German film industry to their knees. In 1983 New Constantin, together with Bavaria Studios, began production on *The NeverEnding Story*, a fantasy film based on a children's book by Michael Ende, which had been a bestseller in Germany for two years. During that time, such films as *Return of the Jedi* and *E.T.* had scored unprecedented successes in the same genre. To Bernd Eichinger, head of New Constantin and at the age of 32 already one of the most successful producers in Europe, the time seemed ripe to cash in on a film version of the book. With Wolfgang Petersen, director of *The Boat*, at the helm, and with the aim to tap into a world market, Eichinger planned to shoot in English and to use American actors and locations.

After going through a number of scripts, building sets and models, installing a special made-to-order blue screen at Bavaria, hiring technicians, it became clear to Eichinger that he was going to need the kind of capital that can't be raised in Germany. He turned to pso to help him find an American partner. After sounding out Disney, Paramount and Columbia, they finally found a taker in Warner Brothers. The latter put up a guarantee for \$11m and pso threw in another \$4m to make up what was about a \$25m budget. Although the American partners contributed well over half the total, *The NeverEnding Story* still qualified for German federal and state subsidies: about \$1m from federal sources and another \$1.7m from the State of Bavaria. This was money from those public sources that was intended to aid the development of small projects by independent film-makers.

After monopolising Bavaria Studios for more than six months, the film was finally released. It had, however, already been disowned by its author. Ende contended that his book was before all else European; what Eichinger and Petersen had created, he raged, was 'Mickey Mouse, a science-fiction thriller in the worst, most clichéd American sense of the word that has nothing in common with the book.' Associate producer Dieter Geissler, original owner of the rights to Ende's novel, insists, however, that the Americans had no hand in its 'Americanisation'. 'Warners' role was purely financial. They exercised

The NeverEnding Story.



absolutely no influence throughout the course of the production.' With Constantin's aim of cracking the American market, Warner didn't have to.

In spite of a big send-off in Germany at Easter 1984 with 239 prints (a number usually reserved exclusively for American films), *The NeverEnding Story* has attracted only 4.5 million viewers for a total box-office of about \$10m. It will not be paying back its German investors (whose contribution came to about \$8m) in the foreseeable future—unfortunately for them, their rights are limited to the German-speaking world. In the US Warner beefed up the film, gave it a new musical score by Giorgio Moroder, a solid promotional programme, and started the film like a blockbuster. A merchandising campaign is scheduled for its American re-release. After all, *The NeverEnding Story* is not a German film or a New Constantin film but, first and foremost, a Warner picture.

Much to the chagrin of their German partners, who had hoped for a Christmas release in the US strengthened by a successful European run, Warner opened the film in July—putting it in direct competition with such summer blockbusters as *Gremlins* and *Ghostbusters*, as well as with the Olympic Games. The film's mediocre showing at the US box-office will be sweetened for Warner by world sales and tie-ins such as merchandising, sales to TV, video and cable. That the film failed to attract much attention to the achievements and plans of the Germans is no big deal for Warner's management. It was, however, a very great disappointment for those in Munich who had made the biggest gamble in the history of their nation's cinema.

Incidentally, *The NeverEnding Story* was the German entry at the Venezia Notte selection of the 1984 Venice Film Festival. It played opposite the American entry—a hand-coloured, souped up and tightened-up version of an old German silent film complete with a new Giorgio Moroder soundtrack called *Metropolis*. A never ending story indeed.

A similar scenario featuring the loss of European values in the European cinema was recently played out on the German stage over Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas*. And as with so many other dramas of the German film, the Filmverlag is one of the leading players. Indeed, Wenders was one of the founders of the Filmverlag, which was intended at the outset to serve as a self-help organisation for the German *Autoren* film (the engaged, 'personal' films of the post-Oberhausen film-makers) which would also function as a distributor helping those films find their place in the home market. And, until the rupture over *Paris, Texas*, Wenders retained a small percentage of the company's shares and a large interest in their activity; seven of his films are still in distribution with the Filmverlag.

Back in 1981, when Wenders' *The State of Things* was released to international acclaim and a Golden Lion at



Harry Dean Stanton in *Paris, Texas*.

the Venice Festival, the director signed on for one of his next projects with the Filmverlag. At that time Wenders had only a treatment, consisting of a handful of pages by the American playwright Sam Shepard, and a small amount of money from German and British sources. The film was *Paris, Texas*, and long before it won the 1984 Cannes Golden Palm the contracts had been signed and a distribution and promotion strategy agreed upon: the film would be released in Germany with 40 prints—a small but normal amount for a German film in its home market. In Munich, for example, the film capital of the German-speaking world, *Paris, Texas* was slated for a total of 295 theatre seats. At Cannes, a press agent of the Filmverlag was heard to say to a group of journalists that the distributor was expecting *Beat Street* (an Orion acquisition) to be its summer workhorse. 'Better you write something about that film,' he told them.

Wenders and his Berlin-based production company, Road Movies, were not pleased. They came up with a 110-page alternative plan for the film's distribution and the proposition that it be started with over 100 prints in the Federal Republic. The Filmverlag argued that the contracts had been signed, and that they were in no position to pay for an additional 70 copies or to get the film into the theatres that Road Movies would have liked.

The affair came to a head with Wenders' appearance on the German TV talk-show *Aspects*, where he was scheduled to talk about the dispute over the film. A court injunction prevented the sound portion of the interview from being broadcast; the director made his silent film debut. Soon after, everything went over to the courts, and the film was put up for sale among German distributors. Finally, eight months after its Cannes premiere and after successful

runs in England and France, the film opened to packed German houses under the stewardship of Tobis Distribution. No court settlement with the Filmverlag is yet in sight. Asked about the Filmverlag's commitment to their founding *Autoren*, Hansjörg Kopp answered, 'We are *Autoren* in the same sense that United Artists were once artists. The so-called New German Cinema is now a thing of the past. It has come to an end just like *film noir* or Picasso's Blue Period.'

All these Munich-Berlin intrigues are of little interest, however, to the decision-makers in Los Angeles and New York. After the success of *Paris, Texas* at Cannes, 20th Century Fox picked up the film for \$1m—a record for a 'negative pickup' of a German film. The studio has plans for handling this 'European' film in a characteristically American way.

Consider for a moment that Wenders has in large measure built his career on the impact of American culture on contemporary German life. His student films had such titles as *Alabama—2000 Light Years* and *3 American LPs*. *Kings of the Road* reinvented the American road movie by way of its compelling visuals and loosely jointed narrative. *The American Friend* paid homage to the action-packed drama perfected by such American *Autoren* as Nick Ray and Sam Fuller (who, along with Dennis Hopper, appear in the film). And of his later films, *Lightning Over Water*, *Reverse Angle*, *Hammett* and *Paris, Texas* were all shot in the States. Wenders would be the first to concede that the memorable line from *Kings of the Road*—'The Yanks have even colonised our unconscious'—has a special meaning for his own work.

Wenders has himself come to embody the spectre of German romanticism that haunts his own films: the restless



Far from home: Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream*.

wanderer, looking for a home. And now, weary of Central Europe, he roams the American sun belt. After living in America and working in the English language for most of the last seven years, in what sense is he still a 'German' film-maker? Why should the Filmverlag have a greater commitment to him than to Orion? Like the question that has been repeatedly asked of *The NeverEnding Story*, one could ask of *Paris, Texas*: is it a German film? Another founding member of the Filmverlag and former business manager, Laurens Straub, commented, 'It is a German vision of what an American film is supposed to be.' Others offer that it is an 'international' film. And that—the 'solution' the Germans have been trying to come up with for decades—has proved to be among its biggest problems.

If the irresistible advance of American values in their own country was one of the principal targets of the New German film-makers, then the conventions of old Hollywood genre films were among the sharpest arrows in their quiver. In the absence of an appealing or vital indigenous film culture, towards what other examples could these film-makers have turned? It is hardly surprising that now—in the wake of the defeat of the political and cultural concerns that gave the work of those film-makers its critical cutting edge—all that remains for the current generation of German film-makers are the tawdry props and hollow scenarios of those American movies. Now dependent on American methods of finance and distribution, all the German film lacks are American actors speaking English.

But not for long. It is becoming standard practice in Germany to write and direct in English. The Filmverlag's new projects include a special effects tale of telekinesis filmed in English called *Joey*. Although still on the retreat

from *The NeverEnding Story*, New Constantin has plans to develop an English-language police series featuring what one producer called 'a German Harry Callahan, a real tough guy.' That was something two previous generations of postwar German film-makers felt the world had seen enough of.

But this 'colonisation' is by no means limited to the German film. German tv survives largely on reruns of such serials as *Bonanza*, *Rich Man*, *Poor Man* and, most popular among them, *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. Of the feature films shown on television in the State of Bavaria, for example, 42 per cent of films in the first and second channel are American; in the third programme 53 per cent.

The new technology boom has hit Germany, and cable tv schemes are being hatched in Munich and Ludwigshafen. With about \$130m of federal money earmarked for a nationwide cable network, the government hopes to create production jobs, raise the level of technological expertise and open up new markets for German media product. Prospects, however, are gloomy without the technical know-how and licensing of such American media giants as HBO, Viacom and Warner. And, should the 20-30 channels envisaged open up, with what do the Germans intend to fill them? ZDF (Germany's alternative tv station) is hard pressed to fill its regular programme schedule. As a policy it buys contemporary American fare such as, most recently, Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* and Bette Gordon's *Variety*, both critical successes at the Cannes festival. German tv has come to be regarded in certain American film circles as something of a dumping ground for pictures that cannot find distribution in the States. That accounts in some measure for the new interest in Germany by the so-called American independents who, like their 'establish-

ment' counterparts, take more from the Federal Republic than they give.

With every project that is written and directed in English, with every story treatment that is modified to appeal to an international concession that studios and distributors make to an American market, a little more of Germany recedes. It's unfair, however, to call the new German game plan a sell-out for short term profit. In their view, they are simply following the path of least resistance to solvency. And it is a path not without its rewards. The names of Wenders, Petersen, Klaus and Nastassja Kinski are now internationally bankable. Cameramen Michael Ballhaus and Robby Müller have established careers on both sides of the Atlantic. Bavaria Studios have no shortage of customers. And New Constantin can add a potted palm to their L.A.-style offices with every *Conan* picture they bring into German theatres.

Indeed, even the German government has no grounds for complaint. They can often earn more from the showing of an American film by way of import, admission and income taxes than the producers of those films do. A portion of the cost of every theatre ticket sold in the Federal Republic goes into a pot that is recycled as film development money for German projects. And—as American distributors in Germany are eager to point out—an overwhelming majority of the tickets torn are to American films.

A key question for the future of the German film community (as well as for those of other European countries) is: will it become simply a training ground for talent and technicians who eventually 'defect' to the us? Unlike their predecessors from before the war (Murnau, Lang, Lubitsch, Stroheim, Sternberg, Sirk, et al), however, the new breed of European expatriate has no commitment to the us as a home either. And with rising costs in the States, together with the tendency for productions to go abroad (to places like Bavaria Studios), the talent and technicians of the film branch here aren't exactly coming out on top. One has only to look at the unemployment in the American film industry to verify that. The only profits being reaped are by the men in suits and ties at the American majors and mini-majors—the upper management and international deal-makers.

But for the men and women in the humble offices of Munich and Berlin, the problems are as enormous as ever. If their 'cultural solution' of the 60s and 70s (the state-subsidised *Autorenfilme*) drove German audiences to the American film, their new 'economic solution' is now doing the same to German film-makers. The very fascination with America that originally inspired a filmmaker like Wenders now deprives him of his home audience—the imaginary South Bronx of *Beat Street* was simply thought to be better business this year than the imaginary South West of *Paris, Texas*. They don't call it the 'consciousness industry' for nothing. ■

THE WIDENING GAP?

Andrzej Wajda, admirer of Steven Spielberg, has some provocative opinions on the health of world cinema, as he revealed to **WANDA WERTENSTEIN** in Warsaw earlier this year...

WANDA WERTENSTEIN: It has been a long time since our last talk. In autumn 1981, I believe, we discussed the script for *Danton* and the stories and projects you wanted to film down the years but never could. Neither of those interviews was published. And the other day we were saying to each other that something has happened to the cinema, as if there was less joy in film-making and film-watching, as if the spirit had gone out of it.

ANDRZEJ WAJDA: I don't see it quite like that. But I do feel that there is a tragic gap, a huge and ever-deepening chasm between European and American films. Or, one could say, between films from the rest of the world and those from the United States. The reason being that in Europe there is less and less faith in film as a popular art, something that is meant to speak to everyone. In America the conviction remains as strong as ever that films are an art form which can be deeply moving, can show reality, and which has the means to shape the audience's attitudes and passions. American film-makers never forget their public.

If I were a French film-maker, I'd prefer to be a Hungarian one, because in Hungary I would be among people who were working towards common goals. All I see in most European cinemas are isolated endeavours with no links between them. And I think the position in Europe is largely a consequence of the experiments of the 60s. We all loved what the French New Wave proposed: that films could be addressed to a limited social group, that to enjoy them you needed some intellectual and artistic

background. It seemed a fantastic new possibility for the cinema, and we were terribly excited by what those young French intellectuals had invented. But what seemed so promising proved very dangerous. You no longer knew for whom the film was made. And one can't think of a revival of European cinema now without feeling that a film has to have something to say, and an audience waiting for it.

Do you think the Americans have something to say to their audience?

I think so. The paradox is that because American cinema is so commercial, because the pressure of money is so strong, everything in a film has to be the very best. That means the most expensive, but it also means the most authentic, the most honest. No half measures, everything on the edge of excess. If they dance in an American film, it is a dance that is almost impossible. Take *Flashdance*, the story is absurd: a girl who can do everything, who dances up the wall, and this girl cries for joy when she is accepted as a first-year student at a ballet school. In this absurdity is some deep truth about the American film.

The amount the Americans are prepared to spend on making their films is in a way a sign of respect for the audience. They hope that the more money they spend, the more care they take over details and production values, the greater the importance of the film will be. Small producers in Europe, such as those I have met in Berlin, are not prepared to spend like that. They believe that producing films is a waste of money, so the cheaper the better.

Isn't that because there's no money in Europe? It's a desperate situation.

The desperate situation is that people don't want to go to see films. Or rather, that the only films they want to see are American. Most films on offer must disappoint because their subjects are so unimportant, their artistic drive nonexistent. They don't appeal to anything that could move an audience.

That's an extraordinary point of view for a European director. You seem to be defending the American attitude, with all its reliance on what they call 'production values'.

Yes, I am. Today a film—a story on tape, aired on tv, viewed at a drive-in or an art theatre, watched on a home video—is such a commonplace thing that the viewer simply feels he is watching a sequel to something he has seen before. The impression of *déjà vu* is very strong. It's a rare film that is able to make an impact on us, through the power of its acting, its production values, the money invested in it, or the inventiveness of its *mise en scène* or the novelty or the force of its subject.

But take *Gandhi*—that could be called

a film we've seen before, made in a traditional way. And it had an immense success everywhere.

The force of the film is Gandhi himself. He is still a phenomenon; everybody is interested in seeing him. It's true, of course, that if the film had been made by a small company, if a less compelling actor had played the lead, if there hadn't been those huge crowd scenes, it would still have had that force, but fewer people would have gone to see it...

But in general I feel that the liberation of cinema in Europe, the magic of the names of great directors and their creative freedom, brought about a breach between the cinema and its public. Film-makers have little to say, the audience is drifting away to other occupations. Before the war, my mother lived in a small garrison town with four cavalry regiments, 5,000 people in all, and she used to go to the cinema every day. Two conditions were necessary for this: a choice of films and a sort of dramatic need to see them. Cinema is no longer an important pastime. The adult public of the old days is gone, and the theatres are filled up with kids.

Some directors are simply not interested in making films for that audience. Why should they change their style or their themes? Others still make grown-up films, but try to wrap them up in something that will appeal to the kids. Half-heartedly made, these films draw half-hearted responses. But American films will address children as children, and the reason so many adults enjoy Steven Spielberg's films, for instance, is that they appeal to what remains of a child in every adult. I love everything childish in these films. But it's only a film-maker of Spielberg's standing and intellectual independence who can carry it off.

It's said that modern European cinema was largely created by film-makers who had fallen in love with the films they had seen and were happy to fill their own work with quotations from their masters. But for a really intelligent use of quotation look to a film produced by Spielberg, Joe Dante's *Gremlins*. The tiny monsters sit in a cinema roaring with laughter at something on the screen. I wondered what they could be looking at and quickly ran through some possible titles. Suddenly I thought, 'No, not Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, they wouldn't dare show that.' And there it was, the really clever, ironic use of a quotation.

You are not afraid of fairy tales of the *Star Wars* kind?

Of course not. The fact that the slogan 'star wars' has passed into world politics speaks for itself. This is why I maintain that American cinema is ahead of its time. That's why people the world over want to see it.

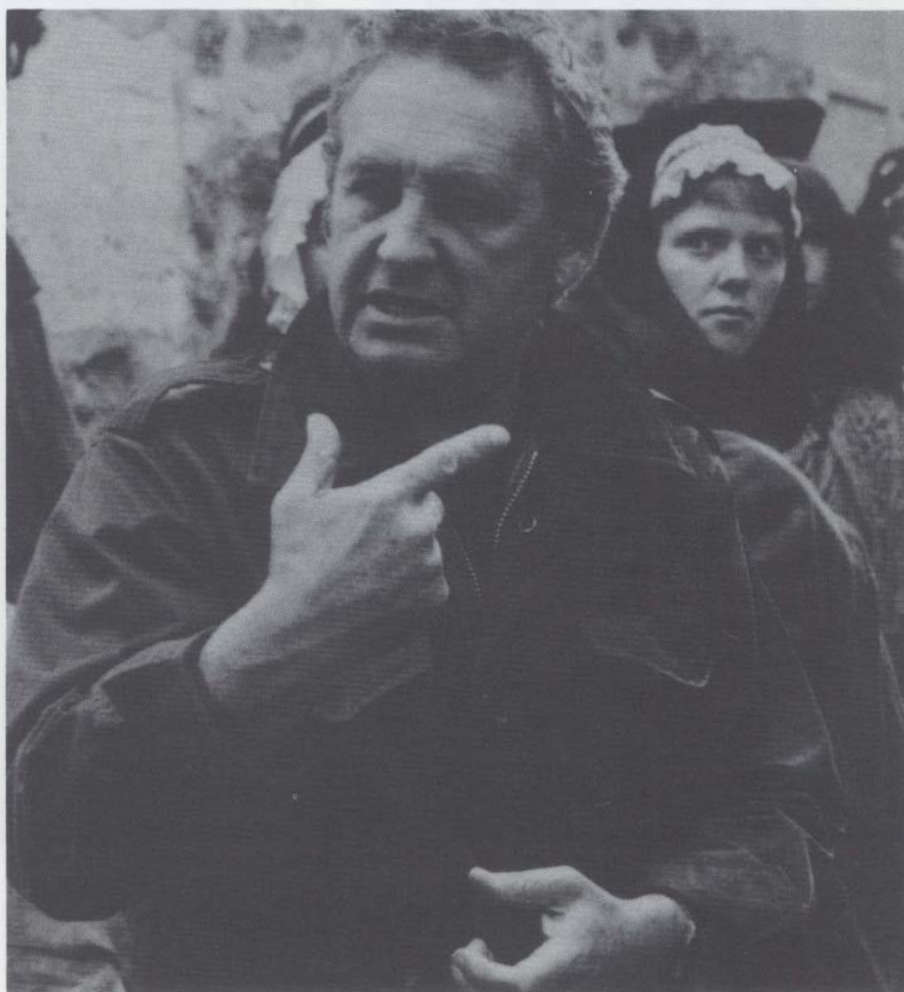
But there is a new division of the

world, and one which doesn't require an iron curtain. East and West have become such different worlds that the frontier can't be crossed, even if there are no barriers. In my youth films did try to bridge the gap, including Soviet films. You must remember how impressed we were by *The Cranes Are Flying* or *The Ballad of a Soldier*; we felt that even though we lived in different worlds we were all human beings capable of sharing the same emotions. There's nothing like that today. Polish films are rapidly disappearing from the world's screens; Russian films are hardly seen outside our Eastern bloc countries. Nobody wants to see them, nobody is interested in them. The awakening of national cinemas in various countries, something that excited us in the 60s and 70s, seems to have lost its way. Take even a country like France, where there were always fantastic new talents. What is there today? In the long run it was the French public who rejected the New Wave films, and there is little in French cinema now to stimulate us. In Poland we have made better films than those made in France today, though the good old French films were much better than ours...

The public didn't go very far towards accepting formal inventiveness in films, and the kind of cinema we enjoy and want to see is, as it were, the nineteenth century novel on the screen. Take some of the most successful recent films, *Chariots of Fire* or *Gandhi* or *The Killing Fields*: they may be showing reality in more journalistic or poetic terms but the form is always, in principle, that of the nineteenth century novel. The same can be said of the books most people want to read. And there is nothing pejorative in the comparison. When I began making films, I thought in terms of a common experience, of people who sat in the theatre and laughed and cried together. Chaplin used to send his assistants out to cinemas to watch how people reacted to the scenes he'd shot. Where would he send them today? To homes where people are watching films on video recorders or to those tiny theatres in multiscreen cinemas?

Do you think video is having a bad effect on cinema?

It ruins what cinema is for me: an audience and a communal experience. But video can also be a form of freedom: for instance, where television is state controlled and regulated, as it is in socialist countries. By putting a cassette into his VCR, someone can destroy the official programme; he is not forced to take what is shown to him. I think this is the main reason for the striking increase of video in Poland. There are no official figures, but it is estimated that there are already about 100,000 VCRs in the country and that the number is probably doubling each year. As film-



Andrzej Wajda directing Danton.

makers we must take this into account and begin to think of making our films independently on video.

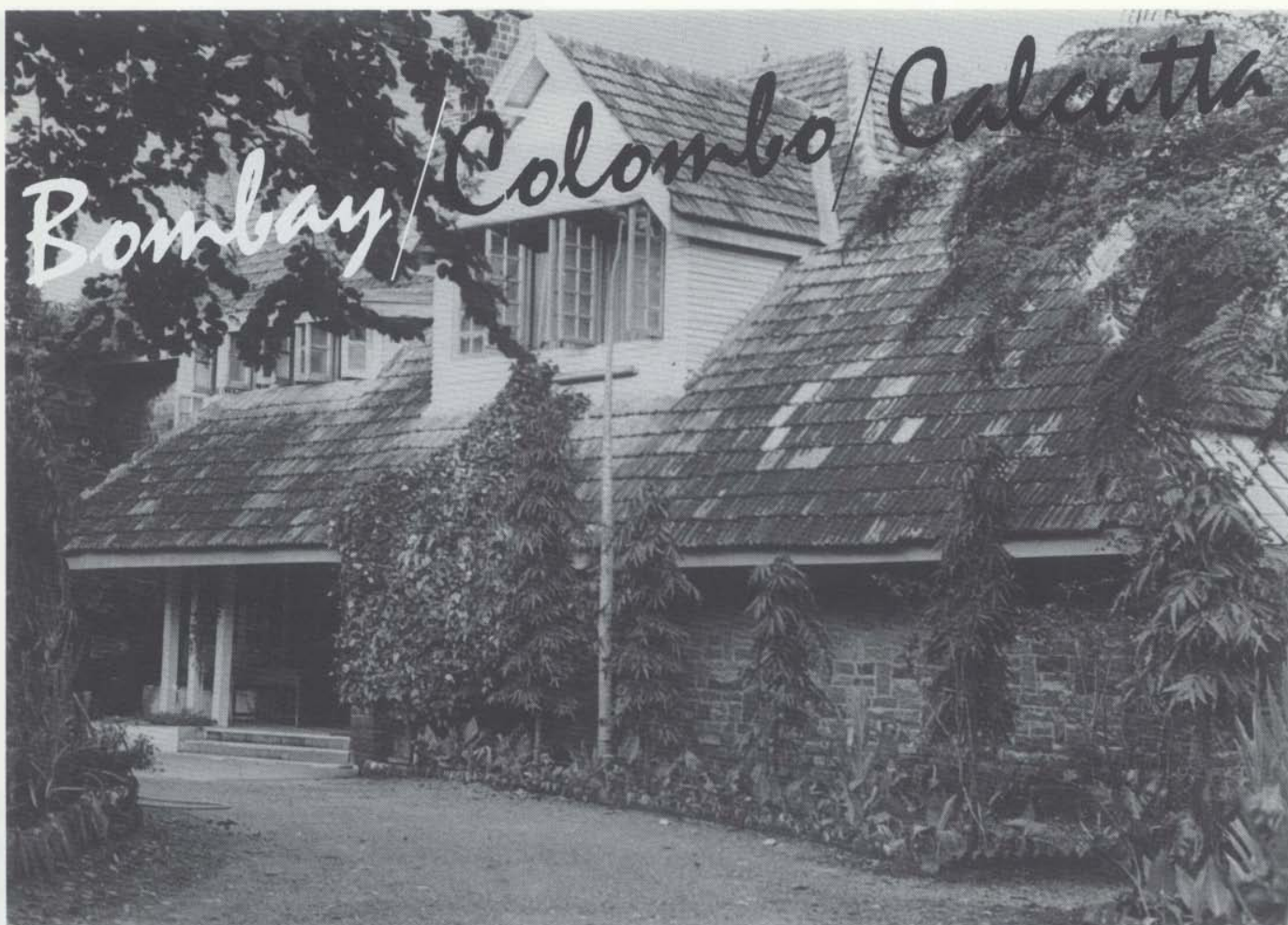
Are you preparing something of this kind?

Well, no. In Paris I arranged with Gaumont that we will start production on a film of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* early in 1986. The cast will be French, with Gérard Depardieu in one of the leading roles, and perhaps the English actor I admired so much in *Another Country*, Rupert Everett, as Stavrogin. The other project which seems close to coming off, after six years of talks and preparation, is a film about Dr Korczak, our great educator and writer, who was killed in the death camp at Treblinka along with the children from the ghetto orphanage he refused to abandon. The Polish authorities have approved the script and I hope to start shooting by the end of next year. When I was in Paris, Richard Dreyfuss came over from the United States to see me and agreed to play Dr Korczak: I can't imagine a better actor for the role.

Finally, after three years, I am making another film in Poland. Tadeusz Konwicki has written a script based on his novel *Chronicles of Love's Casualties*, a very delicate, very subtle story of youth and love and death. It's also about

my childhood because the story is set in Wilno, not far from where I was born. A little garrison town, just like the one in the book, living the kind of provincial existence that is completely unknown today. Some of the themes and ideas that passed through *The Birch Wood* and *Lotna* and *The Young Ladies of Wilko* will reappear in this film, and perhaps I will manage to express them more forcefully. We will be shooting this summer, entirely on location in several small towns in eastern Poland, and I'm very happy to be directing in my own language again, working with Polish actors and my regular crew.

On top of this. I have theatre plans. John Gielgud is interested in the play *The Ambassador*, by Slawomir Mrozek, to be produced in due course by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv wants me to direct, and there are projects at the Schaubuehne in West Berlin and at the Giorgio Strehler Europe Theatre at the Odéon in Paris. And I'll be directing an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *A Gentle Soul* at the Ateneum Theatre in Warsaw with Krystyna Janda and Jan Nowicki. This doesn't seem too much: I have spent a whole year sitting at home preparing. What remains is to hope all my plans come true. ■



Andrew Robinson

visits the Pune Institute, sees a satellite dish in Sri Lanka and watches *The Home and the World* with a Bengali audience.

Bombay, India's Hollywood, hub of an industry whose output continues to rise each year, with some improvements in quality of late. I talk to the friend who has collected me at the airport, a Bombay journalist who also writes for the *Spectator* on Indian politics, about the horror at Bhopal he has just been investigating. The potentially lethal chaos lurking in Indian city life when half-integrated new ideas and technology confront old ways is a favourite source of subjects for the New Indian Cinema. But what Indian film-maker would dare to treat the disaster at Bhopal as fiction, a kind of *China Syndrome* Indian-style? Documentary film-makers are at work. The team that made *An Indian Story*, about the Bhopal blindings, and two graduates of the Pune Film and Television Institute will complete films later in the year according to press reports. Even Satyajit Ray has had an offer from the state government, a remarkable fact given the

government objections to showing *An Indian Story*.

I stay on Pali Hill (Bombay's Malibu) where the by-products of success lie scattered among shady winding roads: the homes of the stars. Dilip Kumar and Sunil Dutt live round the corner. Strolling through the balmy night, I come across Srimati Nargis Dutt Road. Nargis, the struggling poor heroine of *Mother India*, beloved by millions, the late wife of Sunil Dutt and who, incidentally, once criticised *Pathar Panchali* in Parliament (when an MP) for peddling poverty abroad. Apparently this road sign was nearly the cause of a riot when erected. Not because of the name, or perhaps the proximity of Sunil Dutt himself—far from it in the land where family comes first—but because it was the wrong colour. Besides being different from all other signs, it suggested Muslim influence, the secret hand of Pakistan in the heart of India's film-land. The colour was quickly changed.

Pune

'Over the years there hasn't been much love lost between the industry and the Institute, though things are changing now,' according to N. V. K. Murthy, an ex-Films Division documentary maker who is just retiring as Director of the Pune Film and Television Institute, which began functioning around 1960. As it exists on the site of Prabhat Studios, which were famous in the 30s and 40s for what were then radical 'social' dramas, and is only a twenty-minute flight from Bombay dreamland, the comment acquires extra resonance. Though not as much for me as for the Institute's students and graduates who have somehow to make a living, in or out of the commercial industry. The latter include the notably experimental directors Kumar Shahani and Mani Kaul, Nirad Mohapatra (*The Mirage*) and Ketan Mehta, whose new film *Holi* is set in the Institute itself, the cameraman K. K. Mahajan who has photographed many of Mrinal Sen's films including *The Ruins*, as well as actors such as Smita Patil.

It is Satyajit Ray's films that have brought me to Pune. I am writing a biography of Ray and Pune is the only place in the world where one can see all—well, almost all—his films together. The catch is that most are not subtitled, so a young Bengali film-maker and

friend of Ray's has come to help me. Going through sequence after sequence, I quickly realise he is probably the world authority on Ray's films, if you ignore Ray's son Sandip (who is also a film-maker). He has seen nearly all of them at least ten times, some more than thirty times, testimony to Bengali passion: for films, for Ray and for extremes.

A curious, yet typically Indian situation comes about. As the two of us sit at the Steenbeck, in a dingy room of the National Film Archive, almost squeezed out by cans of film, we soon acquire a small group of film students, all Bengalis, come to take advantage of what turns out to be a unique opportunity. It is salutary to compare my response to theirs. I come to appreciate even more the force of the slightly facetious, mock-Forsterian comment with which Ray signed off his examination of the western response to Indian films in *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1982. 'It is more important for the West now to see our films than to understand them... Slighted for so long, India will not yield up her secrets to the West so easily, for cows are still holy there, and God is still a phallus.' I may understand the cows and the Siva lingam, but what about that line from Tagore Apu just quoted or the nuances of his friendship that leads to that extraordinary marriage in *The World of Apu*? It is easy to feel like Mrs Moore contemplating the enigmatic beauty of Professor Godbole's song in *A Passage to India*.

Ray's strictures on foreigners looking at India should also be heeded by Indians looking at their own country. I discover, through many conversations, that his films are not well known among students who are not Bengalis, nor are South Indian films well known to Bengalis. One reason for this is not far to seek, as I sit watching Ray films in the theatre with an impromptu group. There are fourteen major Indian languages, and the informal solution is that students translate for each other, which means that the theatre can become quite noisy. 'It's a phenomenon known as para-dubbing,' one direction student says. 'Irritating for others who know the language but illuminating for those who don't.'

The second reason is more complex, and arises from the Institute's unique situation and stresses, which culminated last year in the first ever student strike. The Film Institute offers ten places a year in each of four basic aspects of film-making: direction, editing, photography and sound-recording. (An acting course was formerly offered but abandoned since it was geared largely to the specific low-grade needs of the Bombay cinema.) The students, a few of whom are non-Indians, are virtually all graduates selected for basic aptitude; few have much experience of film-making. In the Television section, whose programme is run quite separately, applicants are sent by Doordarshan, the government television service, and outsiders may not apply, at least at present.



Far left: the Pune Institute. Left and above: *Holi*, which was set there.

Facilities for most aspects of film-making are said to be on a par with those of the West, and the fees are remarkably reasonable; the total cost for three years, including living expenses, is about £500. During that time a student will probably be involved in making six or seven films. Some of these have been impressive and a few have won international acclaim, for instance *Man Versus Man*, a documentary on the rickshaw pullers of Calcutta that won a Grand Prix at Oberhausen. Some of the teaching is also impressive, both by the resident staff, who make their own films too, and by outside lecturers. Ritwik Ghatak, especially, made a big impression during his two-year connection. Others have been the cameraman Subrata Mitra (who photographed the early films of Ray), Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal and Girish Karnad, a former Institute Director.

The dissatisfactions of the students, I sense, spring from their relationship to their Indian environment and to the wide range of material available to the aspiring film-maker; and, of course, to their largely unsophisticated potential audience. Underlying their complaints about lack of flexibility between courses often seems to be the 'crazy for phoren' attitude, applied, in this case, to foreign techniques and styles of film-making. The commercial Indian cinema has been totally rejected, but many students have tended to throw out Ray and some of the

better Indian directors in the same bag. Ray himself foresaw this kind of alienation in a forthright address to final-year students in 1974, when the parallel cinema in India was beginning to get going seriously. 'This will be the cinema of the young film-makers who know their jobs, who love the medium for its own sake, who are able to resist the temptations of big money and quick success, who have something to say about their own country and their own generation—something that arises out of a feeling of being rooted there, and who however much they may have absorbed their Bressons and Godards and Antonionis, are yet aware that they have to communicate not with Frenchmen or Italians, but with their own countrymen.' Nevertheless, according to his critics and even his friends, Ray is not 'committed' enough. I was amazed to hear N. V. K. Murthy, who knows Ray quite well and admires his films, suggest that he ignores his audience: 'One can't help seeing the futility of trying to propagate the philosophy of cinema as personal expression.'

Between films, we spend our time in and around the canteen, a rather unprepossessing long low shed next to a beautiful convoluted banyan tree. Several times we found ourselves sharing it with lights and once we were excluded in favour of cameras, tracks and so on. The canteen seems to be popular for shooting diploma films. In fact the best one at the 1982 NFI screening of diploma films was a touching documentary about the hard life of a young canteen boy who serves the students as they sit around discussing the likes of Bresson, Godard and Antonioni, I seem to remember.

The Archive is five minutes walk down the road. It supplies the Ray prints, whose condition varies from very good to very worn; it depends largely on the whim of the producer. This can take interesting forms, as in the case of *The Middle Man*, a tough examination

of city corruption made during the 1975-77 emergency. Two mordant lines of dialogue, implying that government honours go only to the unworthy, are missing from our print. A little investigation shows that it had come from the National Award screening in Delhi—obviously someone nervous of government hostility affecting the film's chances.

The Archive and its Director, P. K. Nair, who is something of a pioneer, fighting the Bombay cowboys, have all the usual problems of preserving a film heritage compounded by the extreme speculativeness of Indian producers over sixty or so years, the size and diversity of the industry, with its many regional languages, and the indifference of many in authority—partly a heritage from British indifference, one suspects. 'Why should public money be spent on preserving all the junk that is being made as cheap entertainment by unscrupulous speculators?' is a typical question. The scorn is reinforced by the early film-makers themselves, one of whom told Nair that out of forty or so films made by him only two or three were worth preserving.

It took almost seventeen years after Independence (1947) to start the collection of films in an organised manner, and by then nearly 70 per cent of India's

pre-independence cinema had vanished. The negatives had crumbled into powder, or the silver had been extracted and turned into bangles and ladies' handbags. Nair remembers tracking down the maker of the first Indian talkie *Alam Ara* (1931), Ardeshir-M. Irani, two years before his death. He told Nair that he had kept some reels of the film in his office at the Imperial Studio. 'But his son Shaporji took me aside and confided, "The old man still thinks the reels are lying around his office, but I know for certain they were disposed of as junk. I myself did it as they were creating fire hazards."'

Yet it is tricky to decide exactly which films are worth preserving, even if one can locate them in some unexpected cache. I get the sense that Nair feels almost swamped by the tide of tawdriness. He analyses the hallowed process by which 'a popular entertainment film starts with a real problem and goes on to give a dream solution', thereby gradually reducing spectators to 'imbeciles'. The problems chosen are certainly real enough: the fate of the educated unemployed, break up of the joint family, the need for communal harmony, evils of the dowry system, disintegration of feudal society, religious superstition, corruption in the public service and so on. 'But in the name of

public acceptance and of entertainment they bring in so many extraneous elements like songs, dances, comedy gags that they end up with something totally different, sometimes just the opposite of what they set out to say.'

Nair is critical of the ambivalence of the educated elite to what he sees as brainwashing of a very effective variety, made all the more obvious by the recent success of many film stars in politics, such as the phenomenal Amitabh Bachchan and also Sunil Dutt. 'Is it that they are aware of these things but want the i.Q. of the audience to remain low so that they take these things for granted? One often wonders about those Star Nites and Film Star Cricket Matches and such Filmi Tamashas held to collect funds for national causes with the full blessings of the powers that be... The star is happy to be responsible for collecting funds for a noble cause even though the money comes from the hard-pressed public by whipping up his fan adulation, and the film-maker who makes a popular hit takes pride in having contributed to the national exchequer by way of Entertainment Tax and Income Tax (if he is not a defaulter) even though he knows that money comes from the public. And the public are happy that they continue to be entertained.' □

Clarke's Law

Arthur C. Clarke, Sri Lanka's most celebrated resident, enjoys controversy, though not about the troubled politics of his adopted country where he is, so far, the sole beneficiary of an Act known unofficially as the Clarke Act which allows very rich foreigners to reside in the island but pay tax only on their Sri Lankan income—considerable in Clarke's case, because of the underwater exploration school he has run for many years. To the Act may be added, officially, the Arthur C. Clarke Centre for Modern Technology at the University of Moratuwa, south of Colombo, a 'centre of excellence', according to Clarke, who is no slouch at personal publicity, that is just beginning to function seriously. This will presumably embody Clarke's Laws, which run like this:

1. 'If an elderly but distinguished scientist says that something is possible, he is almost certainly right, but if he says it is impossible, he is very probably wrong.'
2. 'The only way to find out the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.'
3. 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.'

Clarke's early vision of satellite communications, which he published in *Wireless World* in 1945, was recently given formal recognition when the geosynchronous orbit used by satellites was named the Clarke Orbit. This orbit features again in his recent novel, *The*

Fountains of Paradise, which he hopes to have filmed. In it a 'space elevator' is built during the next century from the top of the mystical Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, which is on the Equator as required by the theory, to a space station which is stationary relative to the Peak. The elevator, whose theory has been calculated by a Russian engineer as far back as 1960, would transform transport into space, eliminating expensive, polluting rockets with their limited payloads, much as satellites transformed international communications.

It was, very properly, a satellite that put Clarke in almost instant touch with western cities in 1976, banishing for ever the shouting matches with London after days of attempted contact. He was also the first person in Sri Lanka to get television, a gift from the Indian government in gratitude for his help

Lester James Peries.



with their pioneering project for satellite educational television. When I call on him, his most up-to-date dish, still only a small one, is being adjusted on the upper terrace of his large modern house in the poshest part of Colombo by a passing engineer friend from the United States. He had also brought from New York a gadget that Clarke admitted to coveting: a solar-powered topee, with a little fan set into the front to cool you driven by solar cells fixed to its crown. This late twentieth century version of the sola (meaning 'pith') topee can now be known as a solar topee at last: the spelling most people favoured all along. It works quite well in the hot sun, as did the newly adjusted dish, which gives us feature films from Moscow fairly clearly. Clarke's house is an oasis of gadgetry in a desert of underdevelopment, though the contrast is nothing like as stark as in India. The latest Clarke film, *2010*, is also full of gadgets and high-tech and Clarke declares himself very pleased with it. But he admits that the US critics have not responded as well as audiences or as well as many critics did to *2001*.

It was Satyajit Ray who introduced me to Clarke—or rather Ray's abortive sci-fi script of 1967 *The Alien*, which Clarke was to produce. It featured a benign, childlike alien landing in a Bengali village where his golden spaceship is taken for a temple. My *Times* profile of Ray last August drew a swift response from Clarke, disagreeing that he had encouraged Ray to take legal action against Spielberg for 'striking similarities' (to quote Clarke) between Ray's script, which had circulated in Hollywood at the time, and *E.T.* and *Close*

Encounters. Spielberg, said Clarke's letter, had personally denied it when he visited Clarke for location research on *Indiana Jones*. My interest lies in Clarke's view of what went wrong with the project, which had attracted backing from Columbia and the serious interest of Peter Sellers. He lays the failure squarely on the shoulders of Mike Wilson, his one-time close friend, ace diver and business associate, who had sold the idea to Ray and to Hollywood, squandered the Columbia advance and then disappeared to become a saffron-clad sadhu. Wilson, now Swama Siva Kalki, lives at the southern tip of Sri Lanka in somewhat reduced circumstances, and I was unable to make the journey to get his story. But even if the project had taken off with western backing, I suspect there would have been tears; Ray's magical script is too subtle, too delicate and too Bengali to survive a Hollywood onslaught.

Abortive film projects are old hat for

Lester James Peries, now 66, and his film-maker wife Sumitra. Clarke is an old friend of both and lives not far away, but they belong to separate environments, symbolised by the satellite and the shoe-string, brought together just once, in 1979, when Clarke agreed to don a real topee and play a small role as the British magistrate in Peries' *A Village in the Jungle*, a rather atmospheric adaptation of Leonard Woolf's sombre novel. On arrival at a village in a remote part of the island, a nervous Clarke told Peries: 'The next couple of hours will decide whether you're filming *A Village in the Jungle* or *Carry On, Judge*.' Now Peries confesses to depression about the state of production in Sri Lanka. From a high of about 80 films a year—too many, he agrees—only five or six were made in 1984. The collapse began after 1979 in the wake of the government's decision to end the closed economy. Very quickly the black money deserted the film business, and at present there is no

government finance available, unlike in India through the NFDC.

He has become involved, rather reluctantly, in a co-production between Channel 4, Dutch tv and German tv of the classic *Knox's Ceylon*. Knox was a British sailor captured by the King of Kandy and kept for 22 years as a kind of trader in central Sri Lanka, almost like a Sinhalese peasant. The British, French and Dutch were all then active in the island. Knox eventually escaped to Britain and produced his book *The Historical Relation*, which was published by the Royal Society with a foreword by Sir Christopher Wren and is thought to have inspired *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719. His book is a vivid, astonishingly detailed and accurate description of Sri Lanka's natural and human life, and the series will be a historical recreation using sixteen or so foreign actors. It has already weathered one scandal in which the German contact has been prosecuted for fraud, and some inevitable disagreements over national emphases. Peries is a little doubtful if he has the stamina for it now. If anything he feels more drawn to filming fictional material by famous writers who have lived and loved in Sri Lanka. The rollcall is eminent: D. H. Lawrence, Leonard Woolf (another story), Chekhov, Neruda, Shaw, Paul Bowles and, of course, Clarke.

Sri Lanka has been a favourite source of film locations, as Peries reminds me: *Song of Ceylon*, *Outcast of the Islands*, *Elephant Rock*, *Purple Plain*, a Tarzan film, *Indiana Jones* and of course Lean's *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Peries throws an interesting sidelight on Lean. He used to invite Peries to see rushes at his hotel and tell him that this particular story was not his choice. And apparently more or less the first thing he told Alec Guinness on arrival was that he was not his first choice for the Colonel. Lean wanted Charles Laughton. Whereupon Guinness packed his bags and had to be restrained from leaving by the producer. Later he won an Oscar. □

Arthur C. Clarke in Peries' *A Village in the Jungle*.



Calcutta

Whatever its special charms, Calcutta is a city of bugbears: the telephones and the load-shedding, with its indeterminate periods of blackout, being the worst. Dhritiman Chatterji (the main character in Ray's *Adversary*) says that marriages have resulted from wrong telephone connections—a lovely film idea waiting for a director. The load-shedding, which was very bad in the 1970s due to the political turmoil, and a serious problem during the shooting of *The Home and the World* in late 1982, had improved so much that Calcuttans had begun to think of it as a thing of the past. But two years later many of my conversations with Ray are set against the throb and stink of the generator on the verandah of his large 1920s flat.

How this and other privations affect film-making is vividly caught in Ray's lament in an article written more than ten years ago: 'Here when a shot is being taken, one holds one's breath for fear the lights might dim in the middle of the shot, either of their own accord or through a drop in the voltage; one holds one's breath while the camera rolls on the trolley, lest the wheels encounter a pothole on the studio floor and wobble—thus ruining the shot; one holds one's breath on location for fear of a crowd emerging out of the blue, come to watch the fun; one holds one's breath too, while the film is being edited, because one never knows when the ravaged Moviola might turn back on the editor in revenge and rip the precious film to ribbons. No wonder film-makers are prone to heart disease.'

When I remind Ray of this comment, while discussing a new selection of his articles for possible English publication,

he laughs wryly. He suffered his first heart attack in October 1983, just days before a scheduled visit to London to collect his BFI Fellowship, and a second one about five months later, leading to a bypass operation in Houston in June 1984, where black nurses, 'learning I was an Indian', went out of their way to tell him how much *Gandhi* had impressed them. Between attacks he wrote a novel and supervised very closely, down to exact angles, his son's completion of *The Home and the World*.

Now, though he takes a rest each afternoon and has to spend an hour pacing up and down his verandah for exercise, he is fully involved in story-writing again and hopes to get back to a film around the end of 1985. It will probably be an 'angry' film based on one of several contemporary stories about 'the poorest of the poor'. Ray is interested in making it from the point of view of a bonded labourer, which will

require a great leap of imagination. The only precedent in his work would be *Deliverance*, despite the belief of many foreigners, particularly Americans, that *Pather Panchali* is about peasants on the lowest rung of society. Apu's little family is prosperous compared to the lot of the bonded labourer.

After fifteen months of tribulations, *The Home and the World* finally opened in Calcutta on 4 January, 1985, nearly four months after its London opening. It is playing in four cinemas, one of which, the Globe, has an English subtitled print booked for two weeks. With the exception of one scene at the beginning which has been altered to voice-over because Ray, once recovered, didn't like the dubbing, it is virtually the same film as that seen abroad. On the third night we arrive to a packed house under cover of darkness; by a delightful coincidence it is just before the revolutionary figure Sandip (played by Bengal's main romantic hero, Soumitra Chatterjee) passionately kisses the traditional wife Bimala (Swatilekha Chatterjee). It is the first full-frontal kiss between Indians in a Bengali film, in fact in any film in an Indian language (exceptions are made for films in English, like *36 Chowringhee Lane*) and it causes a sensation in the theatre, with ripples round the audience as everyone begins whispering and talking.

As the weeks go by, audiences hold steady and in some cinemas actually increase. With such an austere film, Ray had been prepared for a short run: 'There's a kind of tension in it; you know that everything is going to fall apart. It has a different tone, key and texture, which probably prevents people enjoying it in the way they enjoy *Charulata*.' But against his expectations it seems 'to communicate with an average audience', unlike, as he points out, many 'art films', including many of Mrinal Sen's, which close after three weeks. As a perceptive friend of Ray, a Canadian married to a Bengali, wrote in a book in 1973, which I am reading in Calcutta: in Bengal, 'the highest duty of the artist is to be sincere, to love his characters unreservedly.' And sincerity, he thought, implied a lack of irony; hence the marked Bengali hostility to *Days and Nights in the Forest*.

One particular moment in the film called forth a response that could be expected only in Bengal. Apparently it happens at each screening without fail. As soon as the noble zamindar Nikhil (played superbly by Victor Banerjee, the only adequate Dr Aziz of *A Passage to India*) picks up a succulent piece of lobster at supper with his wife, the cinema hall is again awash with talk. According to Ray, it's a kind of nostalgia, felt by fish-loving Bengalis: 'All the lobsters nowadays are being sent to Japan!' He reckons that any scene of eating in a film provokes reaction. 'People feel hungry immediately. It's one of the truths of cinema.'

Victor Banerjee's entire performance is a hit with almost everyone: audiences and critics. Victor himself, whom I see days before his departure for Hollywood

and the West Coast to boost *A Passage to India*, seems to have his eyes set on the US horizon. Despite early tiffs with David Lean, he now declares himself thrilled by Lean's cinematic prowess in knocking Forster's story into shape for the screen, and slightly dismissive of Ray's skills as a screenwriter. Ray had in fact suggested Victor for the part of Dr Aziz in 1983. The producers came to his flat, unable to find any actor whom Lean liked in Bombay. Ray could suggest only one name who he felt would look convincing as a doctor and as a Muslim (Banerjee, though not one himself, played a Muslim in *The Chess Players*), and would speak good enough English for Aziz. After the producers left he rang Victor and suggested he contact them at the Grand Hotel and present himself.

If Ray's own interest in filming *A Passage to India* had been able to flourish, the actor playing Aziz would have needed Urdu too; he wanted to subtitle Aziz's conversations with his friends in English for authenticity. He met Forster in Cambridge in 1967, knowing of course of his legendary refusal to allow films of his novels; it seems the college porter used to fend off prospective telephone callers. They met in Forster's rooms at King's College with Richard Marquand, Forster's old friend, had lunch and took a walk around Cambridge. Marquand tried to impress Forster with Ray's distinction as a director in case he hadn't seen any of his films, which it seems he hadn't. But it was useless. Forster kept shaking his head much of the time, Ray recalls with some amusement. 'That was the drone—no!—in words, gestures, looks, everything.' He was adamant and obviously somewhat cantankerous. 'And I felt there was no point in asking why.' He was also very frail, having already had one heart attack.

When the trustees eventually wrote to Ray in about 1980, ten years after

Forster's death, he had lost interest. He felt 'a little bothered about the logistics'—foreign actors, big budgets, co-production money—having recently survived the experience of making *The Chess Players*. He was also bothered by the ethics. 'That was the main consideration really. The moment I found he was not interested I said I'd better not pursue this any more. I felt it would be wrong. I remembered how the old man had reacted.'

There's plenty of film activity in Calcutta, though I have time to catch up with only a little of it. Mrinal Sen has just abandoned a film, because of political sensitivities it is rumoured, and is starting work on a story by Samaresh Basu, one of Bengal's best-known living novelists, and the author of the story on which Gautam Ghosh's *Paar* is based. Apart from Ghosh, the other leading directors are Utpalendu Chakraborty, Buddhadeb Das Gupta and, principally, Aparna Sen, who has a new film nearing completion, based on an original screenplay, as with her first film. It is called *Parama*, which translates as *The Ultimate Woman*, a title that hints at the problem of translating Bengali into English. Its social milieu is roughly that of the lovers in *36 Chowringhee Lane*, but this time the central character is a well-heeled housewife of traditional disposition who falls unexpectedly for a visiting Indian photographer resident in the United States. Shades of Ray's film perhaps. The well-known Bombay actress Raakhee plays the wife and Aparna's husband plays the visitor. He has never acted before and was chosen, she freely admits, because she finally failed to find someone professional who would be suitable and available. This film promises to be even more interesting than her first one. Her intuitive grasp of Indian feminine psychology sets her apart from every other director except Satyajit Ray. ■

Ray rehearsing a scene with Swatilekha Chatterjee. Photo: Hirok Sen.



PLANNING THE BATTLEFIELD

Alan Yentob, recently appointed the BBC's new head of Music and Arts for television, has (at 38) an impressive track record as a director and producer of television films, and as editor of the BBC2 arts programme *Arena*.

He talked to
JANET WATTS

JANET WATTS: You have often been called a maverick, and associated with offbeat ideas, work outside the mainstream. Yet now you are part of the BBC's managerial hierarchy. Has the poacher become a gamekeeper?

ALAN YENTOB: When Bill Cotton [Managing Director of BBC TV] gave me the job, he poured me a drink and said: 'Well, at least they can't say that you're a bureaucrat.' And I do think my appointment is a sign that the BBC felt it no longer had to be defensive about the arts. On the other hand, though I'm called a renegade, I do actually believe in a lot of classical things—education, simplicity, commitment, maintaining standards, a sense of curiosity. These labels usually describe people's perception of you, rather than the reality.

This perception of you took hold when you did the conversion of the *Arena* office, didn't it?

People said I'd turned it into a jacuzzi, or a Japanese tea garden. The truth was more prosaic. The BBC had moved us into tiny boxes at the end of a corridor, so we just pulled all the walls down, at no higher cost than what a professional person might pay for a small extension to his house, and 25 people now work there. But I'm not really very interested in what kind of office I live in. I've moved out now, anyway; you could say I've gone

down a floor. [The executive level of Kensington House is on the fourth floor, *Arena* on the fifth.]

I suppose I see my role in the tradition of people like David Attenborough or Huw Wheldon or Jeremy Isaacs, in that my commitment has always been to programmes. Another example is Christopher Morahan, who is now best known as director of *Jewel in the Crown*, but who was for a time head of plays at the BBC after he had established himself as a director. I don't see this job primarily in terms of management. I think there is a feeling that the BBC needs to strengthen its expertise in this area—commitment to programmes, and to the people who are good at making them—and my appointment is part of that. I think it's imperative that people with creative talent and judgment and drive should find their way into senior levels of the organisation where the policy decisions are made.

What brought you into the BBC?

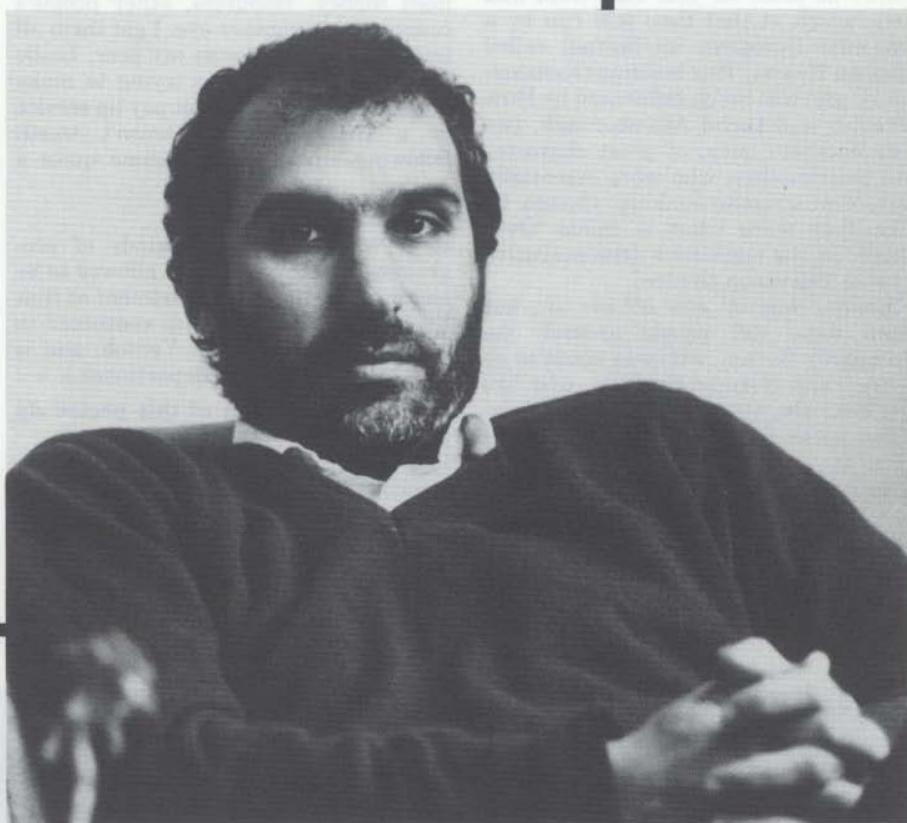
I read law at Leeds University, with the idea of becoming a barrister. But the way law was studied at university was

too pedantic for me, and I also got sidetracked by doing drama productions, one of which won a *Sunday Times*/NUS drama competition, though actually it didn't deserve to; and I'm sure that helped me get offered a general traineeship by the BBC. I joined in 1968, and went to Bush House as a producer.

It was the year of student sit-ins and revolution, and it was all happening at the LSE just across the road. I'd be doing interviews with heads of state, or writing theatre reviews that would be translated and go off to different departments to be broadcast all over the world. Another time, I did a programme about a mining community in the north of England which I recorded entirely down the coal mine. There seemed to be no barriers. And you really felt you were making the programmes—it was quite a single-handed operation in those days.

How did the BBC feel to you then as an outfit?

I think each person in the BBC has his own relationship with it. I've always had a relationship that is something like my relationship with my family, which



Alan Yentob. Photo: Damian Walker.

is a close-knit Jewish one. Bush House especially is a kind of family, full of people thousands of miles from home, for whom it *becomes* home. I'm sympathetic to my family, but I feel I need to be detached from it. I believe the BBC is a benign institution, and I have a loyalty to it, but I believe in saying what you think is wrong to the people with the power to change it. And I think one must maintain an independence from it, to develop one's own instincts.

I knew I wouldn't stay in radio. I assumed I'd go to the drama department in television. But they said: 'We have all these young men dying to come here—there's no place for you.' So I went into Arts, which at that time was run by a congenial European intellectual called Stephen Hearst. This building [Kensington House] was much influenced by Huw Wheldon and David Attenborough, two very energetic men, of great character and individuality, who were essentially part of programme-making, though by then they were what is called 'Over There, on the sixth floor' [the executive level in Television Centre].

Monitor was by now off the air, but there were still people around like Humphrey Burton, who was about to go to LWT, and Norman Swallow, who has just done the Granada History of Television series. It was quite an interesting time. It was followed, however, by a rather bad, middle-of-the-road period. People without the talent of Ken Russell (who by now had left the BBC) were trying to do his thing, and not doing it so well; but nobody particularly noticed, so they carried on doing it. It must be said, though, that there's no question that

Russell extended the language of television. The things he did have been copied so much that they now seem obvious, but at the time they were original and fresh. The programmes going out at this time didn't have the direction of Wheldon's *Monitor*, or the sense of confidence and identity of *Arena* and *The South Bank Show*—even if you don't like that identity.

What helped you through these doldrums?

I do feel that people need encouragement to develop, and you have to get it from someone close to you, not just someone at the top. Nobody can do it on his own. You need money, resources, other people's commitment, another eye. I got them all from someone who was my peer, Leslie Megahey. I felt he was trying to make films in a way that did not pay lip service to a tradition which wasn't worth following anyway. We became quite a team.

The young Turks?

In a way. We did all kinds of programmes. You were really allowed to be an auteur in the arts department at that time. [Leslie Megahey has continued to work closely with Alan Yentob, and is now his deputy in the department.]

Which of your films of this period do you like the best?

I've always been a one-off person, associated with particular single films, some of which seemed to surprise people at the time. When I did a film about David Bowie in 1973, it was quite rare to make an arts film about a rock star, and I remember the row about it in the department after it went out. And when

I did a film about Tretchikoff's painting 'The Green Lady', that was provocative at the time. But that picture was being sold to people for the same reasons as the Mona Lisa; and I was trying to ask, What is it that makes people like it?

How did you come to edit *Arena*?

They didn't want me at first, when I asked for the job. I think I was considered too dangerous, or lazy, or badly dressed: a bit of a loner, who would just do my own thing. Meanwhile, by the late 1970s, I was feeling that a lot of the stuff going out from the department was slightly bland, and did I have a part of it?

Arena had begun in 1975 because Humphrey Burton thought there should be an alternative arts programme, side by side with *Omnibus*. It was a modest project, with a young team and not much money. At first the arts were separated into strands: Gavin Millar took over the cinema strand, and I eventually got the theatre strand. I encouraged Leslie to take over art and design, and we did things together that attracted considerable interest. Then Leslie went off to do *Omnibus*, and when Brian Wenham came in as Controller of BBC2, he let me take over. It was more or less left to me to create the brief, and I felt we were there to take risks, and be provocative, and look at popular culture as well as at the serious arts.

Which was the philosophy behind programmes like *My Way*, *The Chelsea Hotel* and *The Private Life of the Ford Cortina*...

Yes, and those are always the things people mention. But if you count up how

The Private Life of the Ford Cortina (Arena, 1982).



In Las Vegas: The Orson Welles Story (Arena, 1982).

many films there have been of that sort, against the body of films about Orwell and Boulez and Beckett and Buñuel, they are far outnumbered.

A notable success was the two-part profile of Orson Welles you made with Leslie Megahey as director. That one is very important to you, isn't it?

Yes. We'd arranged the interview with a lot of difficulty and many delays; and I was very nervous that it would still go wrong. In the end we did it in a hotel room in Las Vegas. We got there two hours early to set up the cameras and lights, and found Orson already there, watching us. It was uncannily like his own appearance in *The Third Man*. He just somehow materialised. I think he had planned it that way.

I'd already talked to him a lot—wooded him, really—on the telephone; but that was the very first time I'd met him. And for whatever reason—perhaps because I had waited so long and patiently—he made it clear from his first answers to our first questions that he was going to deliver. That first meeting was the beginning of our friendship. He's a real laugh. A lot of it was jokes. I do think some of that experience and friendship got on to the film. There was nothing trendy or tricky about it, which are two words often levelled at *Arena*. It was a totally straightforward combination of a man talking to a camera and the clips. And the best thing was that he really liked it too.

Will you not miss that creative work in your new job? Will you be giving it up altogether?

In the initial stages, yes, because I think it would be unfair to everyone if I were to go off and do my own films. On the other hand, I expect to be editorially involved in projects, and to continue to do quite a lot of interviewing for programmes—always off-camera, I've never appeared on-camera—and I think I can afford to have a close involvement occasionally. I know I need my fix: I need to have access to the producers and the programmes. That is the most important part of the job to me.

How do you see the job? What do you want to do from your new position?

The most important thing I believe is that it is an editorial job. It's about people and about programmes. I don't think you can allow yourself to be bogged down by administrative duties. You have to be interested in other people's ideas, understand other people's enthusiasms and have pretty catholic tastes. From the time I was offered it, I made it absolutely clear that I wasn't going to adapt myself to fit a so-called job: I was going to do the job the way I thought I should. And I wouldn't have accepted it if I didn't think it was going to be possible to make changes.

I'm not a passive agent. I expect to see things happen. I believe one has to step in and say 'Why are we doing this? Do we think this is a good idea?' I think it's fair to confront people with these questions, and they should be asked more often. And I expect them to ask me the same things—are you right in doing

this? I feel that my appointment is a recognition that good work of an independent mind can be done, and the system will still cope with it; and I do feel I can make the department better. Before I took the job I thought about it very hard, and came to the conclusion that of all the people who could do it, maybe I was the best one available.

On the other hand, it's very important to understand the limitations of the job. It's like an editor running a newspaper: you can't expect everything that appears to express your own point of view. And obviously I am not an expert on everything, say on classical music. But I can still see things in that area that ought to be done; and I know where to go for advice; and I will ask for it and ask for it until I'm satisfied I've got the right answer. So I hope this year's Proms will be more exciting on BBC TV than they've ever been.

The BBC in general, and the Music and Arts department in particular, have been going through a difficult period recently. How do you feel about this?

Certainly, I've seen a lot of people who have become disaffected, and who have left—both the organisation, and the department. But they still wish the BBC well, and want to work for it. I'd like them to feel that I'm here on their behalf. So I can be a messenger, in a way.

How do you view the BBC's state of health at the moment, particularly in relation to the licence fee debate and the question of its receiving advertising?

I care passionately about the BBC's survival and I would like to be able to contribute to it. I believe that if advertising comes to the BBC—and by that I mean any part of the BBC, because there's no way, if it came to Radio One, that the thing would stop there—it will destroy the delicate balance of British broadcasting, the balance that has made ITV and Channel 4 as good as they are.

It's critically important that the BBC is supported by the public. Because many of its children are now somewhere else. If you look around, almost every head of an independent television company has been through the nursery of the BBC. But when Jeremy Isaacs and Denis Forman speak of the importance of British television, they're talking about the BBC and the need for it to be there. It is only at moments that you feel very secure that you can let the centre go. It's significant that in America they don't know the difference between the BBC and other companies, and everyone thinks *Upstairs, Downstairs* is a BBC production, because there's a system of shared values between the BBC and the other companies.

The BBC doesn't have a monopoly of virtue, but it is having to cope with all kinds of pressures at the moment. I think people must understand that it has made a fantastic contribution to our culture, and many things have flowed from it—but it is also fragile. If you undermine its roots, you can damage it

very easily. Once a broadcasting company is accountable to shareholders, or sponsors, or advertisers, a different climate is created: and the structure we have now, which rests on the base of the BBC, is what makes Channel 4 exciting, and enables ITV to produce good documentaries. If you look at it this way, you see that you're being asked to pay another £10 or £20 a year to ensure that all British broadcasting is safe.

Arena ran to a very large extent on what one of your bosses calls 'magic money'—you have proved to have a canny instinct for co-production deals. Is this where the answer may lie?

I don't think the BBC should allow itself to be drawn into too many. The essential point is that the BBC should be the initiator; that it should be saying: 'This is what we want to do. We're good at it. We want you to take it like this.' We should have and keep the initiative.

The arts are becoming increasingly international, so in some ways it is all easier than it was. But there is a danger in the temptation to make it all Pavarotti and Domingo, big names doing big familiar operas. If you're forming policy, that's the easy way, because there's always the money for it, so to an extent it is my job to look at other areas. That has to be part of your policy, if you are given responsibility for such a wide area of programming. You can't do this job as intuitively as if you are editor of a small series. You have to plan the battlefield, and get other generals in to help you.

Do you see the arts as a war zone?

I have a very clear sense that the BBC has a public image, and that anything you do could be used as ammunition by the other side. And I am also aware that while the BBC has always had the support of the licence, next year that will be in open debate, and this will increase its vulnerability to anyone who wanted to misrepresent us.

What do you want to see the BBC doing, in relation to the arts, that it isn't doing already?

In relation to the arts, I don't much believe in the 'television professional' who goes from programme to programme. To me, television is just a piece of technology on which things can happen, and I don't think it should be dominated by television technicians who are good at it—whatever it is. If television is to be interesting, especially in the age of cable and video, it must draw on the real world, and on people who have expertise in certain fields—drama, art, film.

In the early days of *Arena*, if we made a film about rock 'n' roll, treating the subject seriously, it was an unusual occurrence; but the world of the arts is becoming increasingly diverse. I believe very much in that kind of cultural diversity, and in bringing things into the mainstream which are not usually considered part of it—especially because I believe this country has been insular in many areas. After all, what is

mainstream? Is Buñuel, for instance? He isn't Spielberg. But he's a strongly Catholic director, and much of the world is Catholic; and if you look at the impact of the Surrealist movement on European culture, you realise his work has been tremendously influential.

Also, of course, you *create* the mainstream on television. When the powers of patronage, and the capacity for influencing people, are as great as they are in the BBC, you cannot ignore the responsibility that you're not just reflecting what is going on—you're making decisions about it. So in modern dance, for example, we should be there not simply watching it grow, but recording it as it happens and saying, 'This is what is going on.'

What will we be seeing on the screen from your department?

Arena, *Omnibus*, *Bookmark* and *Saturday Review* will all continue; in *Omnibus* we will be going back more to single subjects; and there will be more high-quality relays and performance programmes as well as lots of master-classes and workshops, which I find very well suited to the intimate medium of television. I would also like to make much more use of the riches we already have. In the new television Archive Unit, we are reclaiming remarkable material, which also has commercial potential. If you look in the archives, you realise that in the 1950s, when it all began, television was more interested in

the contemporary area than it is today; and I think that we, too, have an obligation to capture people in the arts now who are not just passing, but in whom people will be interested in 20, 30, 40 years time.

Do you have an allotted amount of programme space in the schedules, in the form of a specific number of hours per week or per month? Or is your space like newspaper editorial space—a moveable feast that you have to fight for?

Last year the Music and Arts department made 220 hours of original television, excluding repeats and the original output. This included music and other performance programmes, as well as the regular strands like *Arena* and *Omnibus*. I suppose there's a base line, and that's expanded and contracted each year depending on the commitment the department head can get from the Controllers. And yes, of course, if you want more time in the schedules you have to fight for it. And I'm going to try to see that there are more music and arts programmes on the screen.

Do you also have to fight for your money and other resources, or do you have a fixed budget?

It's very difficult to be exact about this. The operating budget for the department is roughly £13 million a year; but there is, of course, a lot of other input in kind that can't be estimated in cash terms.

You also have to take into account the regional output and the BBC's huge commitment to the musical life of the country with its orchestras and the Proms. Again, yes, in the course of running the department there are innumerable specific needs for extra cash or resources for projects, and they have to be met by pressing all the available sources, both within and outside the BBC.

You look like someone who is on the side of the artist; but you are now also the man on the other side—the man who commissions, who gives or withholds money, who says yes or no. Is this a conflict you find difficult?

Certainly, there is a split. I don't know yet whether it's a complete Jekyll and Hyde situation, but there's a part of me that wants to say: Let's go and see *Them* about that... On the other hand, though it may be vulgar, I do understand the money side, and have certain entrepreneurial skills. So I can be quite a good bridge. The editorial imperative is the principal one; but you also have to be commonsensical.

I may end up hating this job, but at the moment it feels like a big adventure. I think, if I had to say in a few words what I really want to do with it, it would be close to what Michael Tracey said about Hugh Greene when he was Director-General—'He created an atmosphere in which things could happen.' I'd like to do that. ■

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SUSAN BARROWCLOUGH talks to first-time producer Lynda Myles, former director of the Edinburgh Film Festival, about the political thriller *Defence of the Realm*; and **ROB ROHRER** visits the Liverpool location of Alan Bleasdale's comedy *No Surrender*, produced by Mamoun Hassan, his first project since leaving the National Film Finance Corporation.

Defence of the Realm

'The first day on the set they thought I was the make-up girl. Now they call me lady guv.' Lynda Myles is more amused than indignant about the expectations that have been challenged by the handful of young women producers at work in Britain today. Her first film as co-producer (with Robin Douet) is *Defence of the Realm*, a £2-2½ million production by Enigma for Rank and the NFFC. Together with *No Surrender* and *The Girl in the Picture*, it is among the last batch of films to receive money from the now axed NFFC. *Defence of the Realm* is a topical political thriller, an exposé of the secret state at work. When a journalist begins to investigate allegations against a minister, he stumbles across a trail of disinformation, cover-ups, unexplained deaths and the mysterious disappearance of a youth near a missile base.

Lynda Myles, the director David Drury and the writer Martin Stellman share a passion for films like Rosi's *Illustrious Corpses* (which she screened for the crew before shooting began). The title *Three Days of the Condor* is also on everybody's lips. But these films are seen more as inspirations than models. The lighting cameraman Roger Deakins (*Another Time, Another Place*, 1984) is an admirer of Jean-Pierre Melville and wants to make *Defence of the Realm* look unlike anything that has come out of Britain recently. Drury says only half jokingly that he doesn't want to see any shots of taxis, London buses or the Houses of Parliament. 'It's about power, secrecy, expediency and shows contemporary British society right across the spectrum.' Lynda Myles spent fifteen months with the project before filming began, working on the script with the writer and the director boiling down its original 190 pages; and there were the usual lengthy negotiations and delays over finance. The strong cast has a Celtic flavour: Gabriel Byrne, Denholm Elliott, Greta Scacchi, Bill Paterson, Ian Bannen, Robbie Coltrane.

Lynda Myles did not come into production through advertising, television or the music business; the routes of some of the other young British producers. Her route was through film programming. She began her professional life as

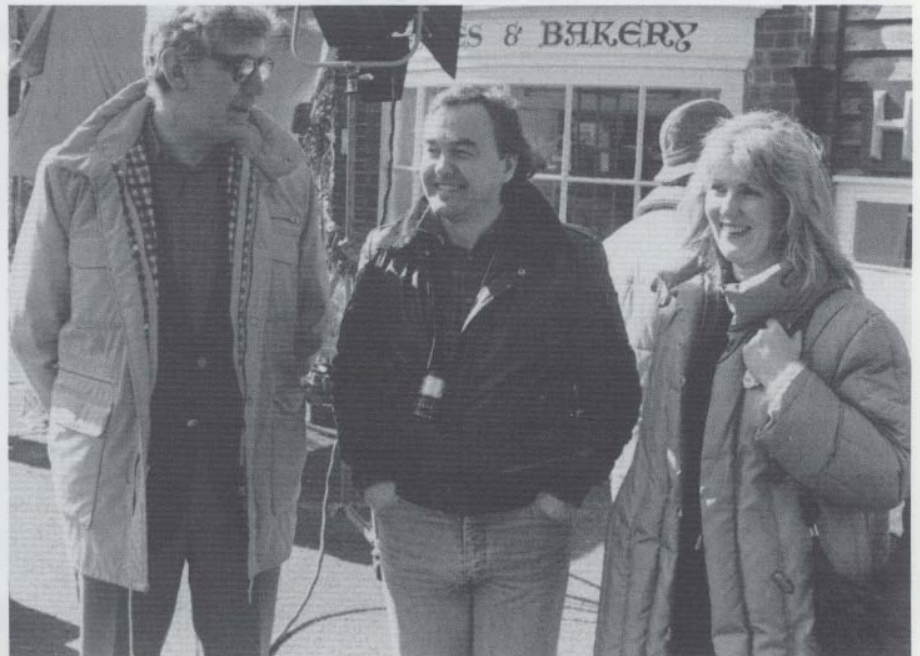
a radio producer, but she made her mark between 1973-80 as Director of the Edinburgh Film Festival. She was that rarity: someone with catholic tastes who also had the guts to back unestablished areas of cinema that she had faith in. Under her auspices, the festival not only welcomed the Hollywood movie brats (Coppola, Scorsese, etc), about whom she went on to co-write a book, but also found a place for major retrospectives of the auteurs: Sirk, Ray, Fuller. At the same time, Edinburgh nurtured the emergent British independent cinema and sponsored events around the new theoretical work of the 70s.

From Edinburgh she crossed the Atlantic to be curator and programmer of the Pacific Film Archives at Berkeley from 1980 to 1982. It was there, with Hollywood down the road, that she began to feel it was time to make the move into production. The signs in Britain were auspicious. She joined Channel 4 as a film consultant and helped to get Chris Petit's *Flight to Berlin* off the ground before moving to David Puttnam's Enigma Productions in 1983.

How has her background prepared her for the transition to production? She laughs. 'First of all you have to give up the vocabulary of film theory. It just gets in the way. No one on a set is going to understand you if you start talking about "objects of desire".' Yet she hasn't jettisoned her past. She was able to draw on twenty years of film-watching and a great deal of film discussion. What her programming past couldn't prepare her for, however, was the script process. 'It's much more difficult than I ever appreciated to know how to read a script. It's one of the most difficult things in the world to get a script into shape.'

Initially Lynda Myles was brought into Enigma by David Puttnam 'to find a story about passion'. She's still looking for it. But how did she go about looking for a script in Britain today? 'I prefer to start at point zero with a writer, rather than decondition them away from television, for example.' She read hundreds of scripts, novels, short stories and radio plays searching for work which suggested the range and ambition necessary for cinema, and she worked intensively with writers on treatments. What she found was typically British: a lot of talent languishing through lack of opportunity, writers who would like to write for the cinema but who had self-censored themselves because they

Defence of the Realm: Robin Douet, David Drury, Lynda Myles.





Defence of the Realm:

(Above) Gabriel Byrne, reporter Nick Mullen, probing for clues.

(Right) Nick Mullen and his courageous helpmate, Greta Scacchi.

(Below left) Bill Paterson, Nick's news editor Jack Macleod, pushing hard to keep ahead of the opposition.

(Below right) Gabriel Byrne's Nick Mullen takes a warning from Denholm Elliott's Vernon Bayliss, the paper's senior newsman.

Photos: Stephen Morley.



MON NI
IN NOW



No Surrender:
(Above) In the social club,
James Ellis as Paddy Burke,
the nearly blind professional
boxer.

(Left) Double booked:
Irish Catholics and, here, a
Liverpool Orange Lodge.

(Below left)
Michael Angelis, the club's new
manager, and, right, Bernard
Hill, his bouncer.

(Below right)
Dracula, a Catholic in
fancy dress.

Photos: Peter Kernot.



believed that the chances of getting a script made were so remote.

As it happened, her first film did not grow out of her commissioned scripts (though perhaps another will). Instead she found it in Enigma's filing cabinet, already purchased but on hold. 'As soon as I read it, I knew I wanted to produce it. You have to fall in love with a script first, because then you've got to nurse it and fight for the money. It's two years of your life, after all.' After a six-week shoot in and around London, mostly on sets, she looks forward to *Defence of the Realm* being ready for Venice perhaps in September and an autumn opening.

And the future? 'Part of me would like to produce films that are in the tradition of *Illustrious Corpses* or *The German Sisters*. Another part loves the full-blown operatic melodramatic sort of

cinema that Scorsese makes.' She wouldn't dare go near comedy. Melodrama, thrillers, the darker side of cinema are what she feels drawn to. 'Gainsborough rather than Ealing,' as she puts it. Among recent British films, she thinks *Dance with a Stranger* and Dave Pirie's *Rainy Day Women* on television have come near that sort of cinema. 'I like cinema that deals with strong emotions and the darker forces. British society is so repressed. I wish we could make more films that release the repressed. What I can't bear is the politeness of so many British films.'

After three years work on the production side, how does she view the state of things in British cinema today? We should, she believes, be looking more to Europe. On one level, German and French government support for their

industries ought to be more of a model than it is for British film policy. On another, there are untapped opportunities for co-production with Europe, with the French and with producers like Chris Sievernich. Instead of always looking to the United States, British production should start looking across the Channel not only for finance, but for a new European film style. The problems are not just financial, although the causes may have been. 'The most neglected area in British cinema today is scriptwriting.' There are many talented writers out there, she believes, but not enough with the experience of the size and visual imagination needed for the cinema. They need the opportunity to try, and Lynda Myles is determined to give them their chance.

SUSAN BARROWCLOUGH

No Surrender

Quiet please, everyone, for the sound of real bedlam. Inside the cavernous acres of the Charleston Social Club two Panavision cameras are shrouded beneath their polythene dust covers. Next to them a choir of the mentally infirm watch their director. He beckons them on. They give vent to a wildtrack of murmuring, gargling, stuttering and hissing. A minute or so of that and the sound recordist nods that he's happy.

The mentally infirm join the rest of the hundreds-strong cast in the catering marquee, and director Peter Smith (of tv's *Bread or Blood* and *The Price*) passively sinks into a chair in the middle of a deserted set to muse his way quietly through another publicity interview. The film is *No Surrender*. The screenplay is Bleasdale. The location is in the Warrington outback, where they've found a real-life social club that will double as the Charleston, Liverpool's answer to Blackpool's answer to Las Vegas, according to the publicity handout.

When *Boys from the Blackstuff* touched a popular nerve, you would have thought there might have been a small queue to size up Alan Bleasdale's cinema potential. Any writer who can conjure up that kind of imagery and impact must surely have prodded a feature film industry so bereft of storytellers and image-makers. One man called. Otherwise, *No Surrender*—now a £3 million film in post-production—would never have come to battle. Mamoun Hassan made the call. He was then managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation and a man just about at the end of his tether with government film policy. Hassan broached the notion of a screenplay. Alan Bleasdale met him and, as good a raconteur as

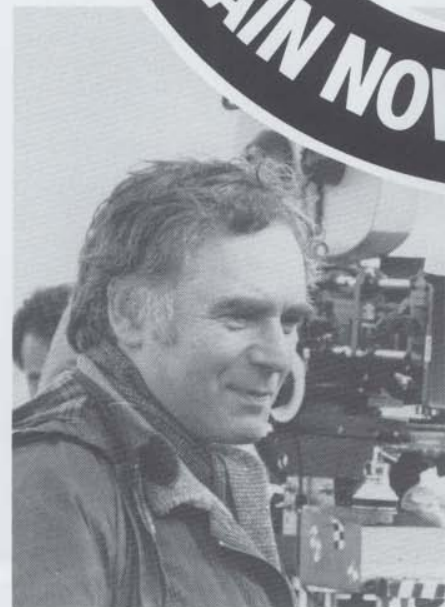
he is playwright, spun him the yarn.

The NFFC promptly commissioned Bleasdale and he wrote *No Surrender*, which ended its first draft as 'Good Night', from the Dylan Thomas line 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' Then, although David Puttnam briefly drew a bead on the project, 'We kind of gravitated towards my producing it,' Hassan recalls, 'because Alan knew I wanted to leave the NFFC once the White Paper came out.'

Into the final deal with the NFFC stepped Video Arts (who also provided executive producer Michael Peacock, the ex-BBC Controller), topping up the cash with a Channel 4 pre-sale and an innovative co-production arrangement with a group of Canadian producers. (The Canadian connection—through a film called *Loyalties*—exactly matches investment by both sides in each other's films and supports that with a finely tuned exchange of promotional expertise in each other's country.)

'*No Surrender* is epic in conception and it also happens to have a cast of 300,' Hassan says. 'There were only four or five days when we were dealing with two, three, and four handers.' The eight-week shoot, mainly on Merseyside, finished in May. Skim through the screenplay and you rapidly get the impression that Bleasdale has rewoven the Bayeux Tapestry with reinforcements—in the shape of manically warring armies from the centre of the Universe (which, if anyone's forgotten their Ginsberg, is Liverpool).

The story line goes something like this. Two large charabancs of OAPs arrive at the Charleston Social Club on New Year's Eve outings. One group is second-generation Irish Orange Lodge. The other is second-generation Irish



No Surrender: director Peter Smith.

Catholics. They have been deliberately double-booked by the erstwhile club manager. The Catholics have also been tricked into coming in fancy dress. Between them sit the mentally infirm, another group somehow lured to the club.

Fifty years of rivalry and hatred bubble up into a storm of bigotry and mayhem. To provoke even further pandemonium, the previous manager has booked a unique cabaret bill—a diabolically bad comedian, a ham-fisted conjuror, and a punk band, Prisoner in the Dock, who rant out their latest song at the pensioners 'We're all gonna Die, Die, Die...' At the centre of the cyclone are Paddy Burke, a half-blind former professional boxer and Catholic (James Ellis), and Billy McCracken, a former

IN BRITAIN NOW

Protestant terrorist and Loyalist (Ray McAnally).

'Billy's mad passion has left him,' Bleasdale says. 'His heart isn't in it, but for the reasons of the plot—and there is a plot, convoluted, but a plot—they have to fight. Billy's heart comes back and for the last time he well and truly batters Paddy. On the surface it's about bigotry and prejudice. But under it all, it's about people trying to keep going, trying to retain their self-respect and dignity. I keep coming back to those themes time and time again.'

Mamoun Hassan is wary about references to *Boys from the Blackstuff*, even though the pub redundancy party which ended the series has clearly infected *No Surrender* with its manic spirit. 'The thing about *No Surrender*,' he explains, 'is that there is a very serious inner subtext—which, by the way, neither Alan, nor Peter nor I wanted to talk about since this is not a common room. The subtext of *No Surrender* is almost abstract. It's to do with the absolutes of the human condition, whereas *Boys from the Blackstuff* is about social conditions which are changeable, and I think that is the difference between cinema and television. Television deals with the everyday. It is the medium of prose, whereas cinema is the medium of poetry. Cinema does not have the kind of hold on people's ordinary lives that television has. Alan's *Blackstuff* films, over six episodes, were able to tell us about the lives of people we'd rather not know about.'

A good few miles away, Alan Bleasdale growls across a glass of Guinness, ice cubes floating in the froth: 'Some people have a gross contempt for television but I also have a gross contempt for most cinema films—that I see. All this stuff about poetry and flying and freedom and scale . . . a lot of the time there isn't any difference between good television and good cinema except the screen's bigger. I'll tell yer what I'm interested in. It's not art house films. What's the quote: Fuck Art, Let's Dance. I wanna dance.'

But Bleasdale's fluent aggression shouldn't deceive anyone. What it houses is his own wariness of theory and pretension. He does perceive the difference in scale and experience of cinema. 'If *Boys from the Blackstuff* had been a feature film it wouldn't have worked and if *No Surrender* had been a teleplay it couldn't have worked because of the scale of the subject matter. I needed six or seven hours for the *Boys* and it was definitely a peculiarly television event, and it needed that reaction from a mass audience, sat at home with the curtains drawn in more ways than one, and trying to get people to open those curtains. You wouldn't be able to get that experience in the cinema over two hours.'

'*No Surrender* is as big as it is because I didn't feel I had any restrictions. I thought if someone's soft enough to give us three million pounds to do this then they're going to let me break all the rules, yeah, fly! I've set it in a specific part of the world. It couldn't be any-

where except Liverpool, but you don't have to come from Atlanta, Georgia, to appreciate *Gone With the Wind*. What I believe is that life is surreal, is a mad and appalling, bizarre farce. So my idea of naturalistic drama is inevitably surreal because that is natural and the madder and bigger you can get it without it being a *Carry On* film . . . 'he pauses for Guinness . . . 'that's real life.'

To direct, Hassan sought out Peter Smith, whom he had known since they were film editors many years ago. Since then he has had several closer looks at Smith's work, including the BFI-financed feature *A Private Enterprise*. 'No Surrender needed simplicity and simplicity is the hardest thing of all to achieve,' Hassan says. 'Also I didn't want a self-regarding director, because if you show off with Alan's material it would kill it. I thought they'd work well together. They took a bit longer to find out.'

The early hiccups in the relationship between writer and director—maybe due to Smith's deceptively diffident air, and Bleasdale's creative search for grizzlies as big as himself—have disappeared, replaced by Bleasdale's undisguised admiration. 'I thought he'd be eaten alive. Then, on the first day of filming, this colossus walks on to the set. I'll always say I'm sorry, but I rarely write letters. I wrote him a letter, saying how much I regretted the conflicts.'

No one is talking about water that's passed under the bridge, but there is a whiff in the air of battles won and lost over casting. Casting is important to Bleasdale because he has increasingly written with particular actors in mind. He reckons to have cast 80 per cent of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, and 90 per cent of *Scully*. For *No Surrender* he puts it at

40 to 50 per cent of the major roles. 'By and large, I got what I wanted and they got what they wanted. A working compromise. Out of a need for the actors whose work I love, I brought in various people not all of whom are in the movie now, but that's in the spirit of compromise.' Michael Angelis, Bernard Hill, Andrew Schofield and Tom Georgeson are some of the Bleasdale ensemble who made it into the final movie to join James Ellis, Ray McAnally and Joanne Whalley. It's anybody's guess who didn't.

Back on location, Mamoun Hassan sits at a table in the Burglar's Bar—the scene of so many break-ins—between the two lavatory doors: Strangeways and Holloway, say the signs. He carefully pickets his own belief and enthusiasm with cautionary thoughts: 'It is so bold and risky it may not come off. Will it be funny? Will it be understandable? Will it travel? Alan's *Blackstuff* series hasn't had a substantial effect in America. It was admired in Australia, but not watched by a lot of people . . .'

He has watched Smith and Bleasdale work together to create a protective chemistry. 'I was a little surprised that Alan called it a deadpan farce, because there is a thriller in it. But then I realised he had talked to the actors in calling it that. And Peter is always trying to tone down the performances. Don't Act, he's telling them, Don't Act. Take it down. Not so hot. Not so much colour. He's right. If you stress the drama it won't be funny. It will only be funny if actually no one in the film knows it's funny.' From the script, and the feel of it on location, *No Surrender* looks as though it's going to fill the cinema seats in the same way it fills the big screen. It'll travel. It'll certainly dance.

ROB ROHRER

Producer Mamoun Hassan and writer Alan Bleasdale.



LENIN'S BEARD

Reflections
on the Cinema of
YULI RAIZMAN

Mark Le Fanu



Russian film-making and Russian film-makers are once again catching the interest of the West. Tarkovsky, settled in Italy, is busy directing a picture in Sweden. Konchalovsky has made a film in the United States. Ioseliani has been working in Paris. The Armenian Paradjanov is thankfully now out of jail. The position of these men appears to be independent, without being necessarily dissident: they follow their own chosen way. They have, for various reasons, an ambiguous relation to the regime of their country. Perhaps all artists have, towards all regimes. On the other hand, the career of Yuli Raizman, last year commemorated by a wonderful season of films at the National Film Theatre, takes its interest from the fact that while he is in many ways as great as the artists just mentioned, he has been going on for very much longer, and has seemed to share none of their restlessness—remaining content, on the contrary, to stay within Russia over many decades as, now, one of its most honoured establishment film-makers.

What does it mean to be an establishment film-maker within the Soviet Union? And is the position congruent with integrity—or with greatness? Raizman's career, properly understood, presents an exemplary testing point to the thesis that Soviet art is tainted by propaganda. For perhaps, on investigation, it is. But equally, one might find

that it's not. We owe it to ourselves to ask the question honestly.

Starting as early as 1927, Raizman's career may be divided in two, the break coming around 1960 (to coincide with the post-Stalinist thaw). I shall discuss the later films first. *Can This Be Love?* (1961), *Your Contemporary* (1968), *A Strange Woman* (1977), *Private Life* (1982) and *A Time of Desires* (1984) take as their subject matter social issues which, while having their own individual 'Russian' shape and flavour, are shared by most modern industrial societies. *Can This Be Love?* looks at the problem of adolescent love entanglements; whether and in which circumstances they must be treated seriously by adults. *Your Contemporary* is about the management of complex planning in industry. *A Strange Woman* takes for its subject marriage and adultery (with a focus on the harrowing spiritual consequences of the latter). *Private Life* is about the trials of retirement and old age. *A Time of Desires* is about a woman's difficulty in finding the right marriage partner.

There are many things that can be said about these late, resplendent movies. They are first of all constructed with an impeccable formal elegance and craftsmanship. Crane shots and scope are utilised in *Can This Be Love?* and *Your Contemporary* with the sort of massive and imperturbable confidence

that used to be commonplace, right across world cinema, in the 50s and early 60s. *A Strange Woman*, *Private Life*, *A Time of Desires* return, as far as screen size is concerned, to the old-fashioned box ratio: they are smaller and more intimate. But these latter films, superficially quite like television, seem to possess in turn a sort of dreamlike austerity and economy only to be found in certain very great masterpieces (I am thinking of late Ozu; but equally of late Hitchcock and Hawks). 'Form' as a separate detachable entity has been so mastered as to efface itself, leaving us with the film-maker's naked serious gaze into the human soul.

What is most impressive about these films is their quality of seriousness. The characters are highly articulate, but their articulacy is not of the shallow verbalising variety that passes so often among educated people in the West for intelligence. On the contrary, the gravity—the profundity even—of their speech may be said to belong to the reticence of the actors and actresses who, each of them, adult and adolescent, possess across their brows and in their features an irreducible inner reserve and privacy. You could say (if it would be understood properly) that the women and girls are all extremely beautiful, the men either haunting or distinguished.

The ethical quality of acting is difficult to talk about accurately (beyond

perhaps pinpointing a necessary congruence between the intrinsic character of the actor, and the character of the role that he or she is called upon to interpret). But there are other factors that make these films special. For one thing: their drama subsists without melodrama. In recent years, much attention has been given, in film studies as in literary criticism, to narrative. But as with 'form', perhaps, the really great function of narrative is to extinguish itself. There are certain films, not necessarily the most famous (often, for instance, some quite minor Western), in which, without losing a jot of tension, everything is slowed down to the very pace of existence, everything becomes looked at, miraculously, for its proper duration. Extraordinary how difficult it is for the twists of plot—they are curves, really, rather than twists, in Raizman—to emerge organically from the action, rather than from the dictates of the scriptwriter.

The generic heading under which these attributes should be placed is that of Realism—if only to distinguish it from the other famous strand of Russian filmmaking, the visionary or operatic sublime, as represented by, say, Eisenstein and Tarkovsky. In truth, all great cinema—including Eisenstein's and Tarkovsky's—is realist; but a number of distinctions suggest themselves. Raizman's idea of cinema was crystallised in the mid-20s by a viewing of Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*. From then on, he claims (in an interview to which I shall return), he knew what kind of cinema interested him. An extraordinary road to Damascus—or maybe not so extraordinary. Chaplin, of course, was popular among highbrows of the period. One thinks of Eisenstein's homage. But it wasn't, apparently, the clowning that appealed to Raizman, so much as the surrounding documentary meticulousness which is a feature of Chaplin's best films (as it is a feature, incidentally, of Hitchcock and Lang). Even if the intrigue was extravagant,

the world was somehow present in the background, in its density. Chaplin's films showed poverty and affluence and the multifarious shades in between—streets, cafés, alleys, gambling houses, saloons, the gestures of passing men and women (waiters, taxi-drivers, society hostesses), all caught with a heightened sharpness that is its own unwarranted pleasure, eclipsing from now on and for ever the artificial vagaries of the stage.

Is it possible to see in Raizman's fascination with realism a further political import? For the preferred direction among the best Soviet filmmaking of the time tended, as everyone knows, towards experiment and montage. Realism, in this context, sharply distinguished from the later perverted socialist realism, has perhaps a sort of in-built restraint against lying. In contrast to the ideological manoeuvring (ideological bullying, really) that was a feature of montage, the function of realism might almost be stressed as conservative: to preserve, that is to say, the record of a society which, against the official ideology, is, in its massive vital complexity, and despite the great upheavals of the 20s, determined not to allow itself to be got at.

This respect for the texture of the real, impressing one forcibly as maturity (perhaps the greatest maturity a filmmaker can possess), can be pointed to by reference to any number of sequences in Raizman's later films, refined into consummate artistry. Hitchcock says in his interview with Truffaut that the film-maker ought to 'fill every inch of the tapestry'. The desideratum is met by Raizman in the achieved polyphony of his *mise en scène*. No character is introduced, no matter how minor, about whom it can't be intuited that he possesses an individual destiny—a destiny which might in turn, in different circumstances, have become the film's subject or interest.

Can This Be Love?, for example, recounts the tragic consequences of a love affair between two schoolchildren.

Boris and Xenia originally belong to a little gang comprising ten or so fellow pupils, and the early part of the film is full of delightful sequences showing them on their way to and from school, teasing and daring each other, boys showing off to girls (they dash across the road between convoys of construction trucks), girls holding back with a mixture of mockery and reserve: all caught fleetingly and charmingly in a wonderful naturalism of camerawork. Nothing is more impressive in these sequences however than the length of time it takes for it to emerge (which is just exactly the right time) that it is indeed this particular playful girl Xenia, and that particular proud, shy boy Boris, who have been chosen as the focus of the story. Their lives, then, belong among other lives—even as their souls belong fiercely to themselves. And this is true about all Raizman's films.

In general, Raizman is a master in these late films of the controlled crowd scene. Two sequences in particular linger in the memory from *A Strange Woman*, his great daring chamberwork. In the first, the lawyer-heroine visits a restaurant in the countryside with her lover, a handsome bearded scientist. The restaurant as it happens is crowded with holidaying Russians and foreign visitors, so that they have difficulty in finding a place. Undaunted, the lover attaches himself to a party of Africans, installing himself and the woman at their table. There follows a splendid sequence of introductions and handshakes, up and down the table and diagonally across it, with the lover taking over the party, ordering wine and dispensing toasts. The geometry of the sequence, in terms of cutting and editing, is breathtaking in its economy, but at the same time so unobtrusive that you could be forgiven for failing to notice its artistry. The scene has indeed the precision of Chaplin (with the same marvellous knowledge about 'type'). Its lightheartedness is congruent with its seriousness, and it is serious, rather

Can This Be Love? (1961).



than farcical, because of the many different levels on which the scene signifies. The man is showing a side of himself to the woman that she has never seen before, and her bewilderment is subtly different from that of the Africans.

It is wrong to take up space with repetitive examples, but there is another sequence from the film that ought to be mentioned in passing, for its mastery. The scene takes place at a Moscow railway station. It occurs at a moment of high drama when the woman (a successful, attractive professional, hence the indignity) has walked out for the second time on the man she loves—actually the same bearded scientist—and has found herself with nowhere to go except back to her widowed mother in the country. Arriving to buy her ticket, consternation: she discovers that the schedules have been changed and the train doesn't depart until dawn. A night will have to be spent in the crowded waiting-room. (She makes a move to telephone the lover, but it's impossible.) Her smart clothes and elegant suitcase, combined with her subtle, profound sorrow, make her conspicuous, a target for passing drunks and pick-up artists. She settles down and waits for the night to pass.

The technical challenge of the scene, which is a very long and complex one, is to make the woman's actions meld seamlessly into the general bustle and yet stand out in terms of their own particularity. Among the dense throng of passengers also waiting for a train is a young man whom we haven't yet come across, but whose persistent polite attentions to the woman are destined, later on, to culminate in the third of the movie's key love affairs. The way in which Raizman introduces the young man Yuri out of nowhere, conjuring him out of the crowd, goes beyond mere marvels of film technique: for in its restrained, delicate naturalism there seems to me a magnificent demonstration of the effects of chance in our lives. The couple might have met or they might not. And the young man might or might not have determined to follow up the meeting in the mad sacrificial way which the rest of the film will be intent on describing. In the midst of the crowded concourse the film pauses and, quasi-autonomously, decides to take on board another human destiny. It is the feeling that until the final moment of decision in anyone's life anything can go either way, which strikes me as the film's great spiritual freedom and generosity.

One uses the word 'spiritual' advisedly. It is not always a popular word in criticism; on the other hand I don't see that this is reason to be faint-hearted. In the late cinema of Raizman, the issues are social, as one would expect in a public artform under communism, but the solutions are in the end, as they must be, individual, and peculiar to the person who is suffering them. One reason why Raizman's films are so interesting to us is that they offer an opportunity to examine, at the most



A Strange Woman (1977).

impressive possible level, the meaning of socialist morality: how and in what ways, that is to say, it differs from the morality prevailing elsewhere among Westerners (residually Christian and liberal).

The question is plainly very complicated. Raizman's late films are full of excellent confrontations in which matters of social responsibility are gravely and publicly argued about. In *A Strange Woman*, for instance, a meeting for young people is called in the provincial town to which the lawyer has banished herself (presided over by the lawyer herself) to discuss the 'socialist morality of courtship'. Outside the context of schooling or religious instruction, such an idea seems to Westerners, doubtless, sufficiently old-fashioned and naive. But as the debate proceeds (once again, beautifully shot) one is struck only by the fieriness and tender sincerity of the participants. Far from parroting answers provided by a morose official ideology, they all speak from the heart, with clarity and lack of self-consciousness. The morality, it seems to me, is a natural one; as if, in the higher reaches among which such matters can be debated, the true answers will always be similar. If the absence of religion in modern Russia is a profoundly significant phenomenon (profoundly regrettable in my opinion), yet watching the films of Raizman is to be temporarily persuaded that in the most important matters of conscience and morality, there is no great unbridgeable gap between Us and Them, between West and East. The exigencies of living in society—family, schooling, making one's way in the world—impose their own categorical limits, and suggest solutions that would not be out of place anywhere.

Is it always like this with Raizman's films? Readers won't need to be re-

minded that the present relative stability—ossification, to its enemies—of the Soviet system terminates, like an exhausted weary trance, one of the profoundest upheavals that any great nation in modern history can have been called upon to endure. The upheaval persisted through half a century, as bitterly in peace as in war. The massive casualties of the Great Patriotic War are matched in numbers, it has now become known, by the peacetime casualties of the Bolshevik and Stalinist purges. Throughout this period, the Soviet artist was invited to sing the praises of the system that was coming into being, even as he knew that its implementation at that very moment was devouring friends, lovers, colleagues; along with multifarious innocent bystanders. Those who perished attest, after all, tragically, to their integrity. But how do we make sense of the survivors—I mean, particularly, of artists who flourished in the interim? What does it mean to have been a functioning film-maker throughout the period of the holocausts?

Needless to say the issue is one of great delicacy, and maybe finally impossible to answer. One doesn't ask a man like Raizman straight out, even should you get the opportunity, whether he admired Stalin or not. There are matters which, without intrinsic knowledge, must be speculated on, if at all, tactfully. Yet for me the evidence of the late films is almost sufficient proof in itself—proof, I mean, that in his heart this artist has always secretly been his own master. And I must add that seeing him in the flesh at the National Film Theatre, and listening to the masterful and generous way he handled his audience, only confirms my opinion. There are faces and voices one trusts.

On the other hand, the matter doesn't quite rest there. If Stalin is mercifully absent as guiding spirit and icon from



A Time of Desires (1984).



The Last Night (1937).

Raizman's earlier movies (at least from the films I saw), this plainly isn't the case with Lenin. One can go further, in fact, and claim that, on the evidence provided, Lenin was probably the single most important spiritual influence on Raizman's career. There is first of all the uncanny physical resemblance, now, in his old age—a matter, perhaps, that is not quite so adventitious as it sounds. A scene in *Flyers* (1935) has Boris Shchikin as the commander of a flying school near the Black Sea being asked by the flirtatious young lieutenant Galya (Y. Melnikova) why he continues to wear his beard, and wouldn't he be handsomer without it? The wry, thoughtful smile with which he answers her gives the game away. One emulates one's heroes by doing one's best to look like them. Some inner touch of humour—some privacy—convinces me at that moment that Raizman is striking an autobiographical reminiscence. Shchikin, of

course, did look like Lenin in real life, and went on to play him in two of the more interesting Soviet films of the 30s (sociologically interesting, that is): *Lenin in October* (1937) and *Lenin in 1918* (1939), directed by Mikhail Romm. They are ferocious and bloodthirsty entertainments, shocking and sinister in their professed admiration for terrorism; but the undoubted gruff charm with which Shchikin incarnates the Bolshevik leader does point up the issue one is thinking about. Was Lenin a suitable man to give allegiance to? And how does one judge people who, within that maelstrom, did so? (Maybe even continue to do so today?)

Another scene, from towards the end of *The Last Night* (1937) comes to mind (the 'last night' in question being the evening in Moscow before the revolution). A certain Mikhailon (V. Gribkov), president of the revolutionary committee, lifts himself on top of a make-

shift podium to make a speech about the coming revolutionary struggle. We have seen the man before in quieter moments and maybe admired his shrewdness and toughness. But as soon as he starts to speak in this scene the gestures and phraseology take on the borrowed habit of Lenin; he becomes one of the thousand orators set loose on the populace, in the bullying flood of rhetoric which engulfed the Soviet Union in the revolutionary period (and which survives to this day—in attenuated form—in the copiousness of its official propaganda).

Raizman at that moment is unable to judge Lenin properly, instead gives way to him; and you could show the same thing by taking instances from other films—*The Communist* (1957), for example (a more interesting movie than *The Last Night*): in the obligatory scenes showing Lenin (B. Smirnov) taking command of meetings, cowering subordinates, requisitioning building materials, barking orders into telephones, and dispensing, in general, his gruff and manly largesse. Such scenes strike the viewer now as childish and sentimental; they mar as they must (if only temporarily) the films that contain them. The trouble is, in pointing to their existence one is not really quite sure what one is doing. Should one attack Raizman for including them at all; or should one not, on the contrary, marvel at the number of times (in comparison, say, with other Soviet directors) he succeeded in getting away with *not* including them? I doubt we can ever know what the answer is.

As a matter of fact, *The Communist* is a very fine film. Ostensibly about the conversion to the cause of a young peasant in the early 20s and his subsequent martyrdom to the Whites, the film in practice returns its audience again and again to things that are older than communism. The wooden huts in

The Communist (1957).





Mashenka (1940-42).



Flyers (1935).

which the characters live and suffer have a Gorkian, peasant beauty and utility. The land and the forest are present with noble simplicity. Even the market is functioning. The white kerchief which the hero offers his would-be mistress Anyuta belongs, still, to the old order of religious-symbolic offerings that have not been annulled (as probably they shall never be annulled) by up-to-date reflections on property and collectivism. Of course the film is not *against* communism—how could it be?

But the communism that is admired and extolled harks back to the earnest, trustful, generous infancy of the movement, rather than to its latter-day weariness.

The film focuses, in fact, not on ideology but on the love affair between the hero and Anyuta, imagined (or rather embodied) by Raizman with a passion and poetry worthy of Dozvhenco in *Earth*. One won't soon forget the scene in which Anyuta hurries from her dormitory to the river bank to keep a

rendezvous with Vassily (the hero); and then, catching sight of him pacing like an animal in the moonlight, retreats in overwhelming confusion. At such moments one thinks not only of Dozvhenco but of Murnau—of *Borzone*. There is also a terrific funeral scene on a hillside—an atheist funeral, like the one in *Earth*; except, unlike *Earth*, neither joyful nor humanist, but bare and stoical as the funerals of Ford or Hawks; differing only from those masters in its felt absence of the Christian liturgies. (I took the opportunity of asking Raizman about religion at the NFT interview. He answered courteously and not, I think, ironically; he said that personally he was an atheist; that he had never really mixed with religious folk; but that the problems of religion 'interested' him.)

Your Contemporary (1968).



Flyers (1935) and *Mashenka* (1940) are finally the films that puzzle me most; they are, for the period, so inexplicably full of delight. A serious study of human relationships (in fact, a triangular love affair), *Flyers* miraculously refuses the obligatory political pigeonholes. There is nothing at all about communism. The action takes place in the South, near the Black Sea, next to a town whose wide, treelined avenues and handsome balconied houses point to commerce, leisure, privacy, a certain kind of pre-revolutionary pluralism. The film summons up, heaven knows how, the atmosphere of carnival and parade which in days gone by was a feature of garrison towns. The flying cadets wear handsome white uniforms. Everything is witty and stylish. There are marvellous dances and parties. The crane and travelling shots are as developed and magnificent as the crane shots in the films of Max Ophüls (involving the audience in a similar vertiginous exaltation). Whence and from what quarter, one wonders, did Raizman find

the confidence at that time to make a film so dangerously adult and happy?

Mashenka (1940, not released until 1942) is also very beautiful. A girl who works for the post office—ordinary, pretty and charming—falls for a hot-headed fellow who jilts her at their engagement party, running off with her best friend. A year or so later brings the war with Finland (1939) and a general mobilisation: she finds herself as a nurse at the front. In one of those rickety inns that might have been staged by Borzage (from a movie like *A Farewell to Arms*), she meets her lover again; once more to lose him (their orders take them in different directions), and then to find him for the last time—yet only to say farewell—amid the chaos of advancing transport columns.

In wartime, of course, emotions are universally pitched towards drama. Marvellous as these later scenes are (Raizman, it turns out, is a fantastically good action director), the peacetime scenes to me are more interesting. They possess about them a lovely deep freedom and happiness. The worthless fiancé—he is not actually such a bad fellow—drives an open-roofed taxi; and when he takes Mashenka home one summer night, instead of kissing her he recites her a poem, which stays in her heart—one of those private epiphanies from which love inexplicably burgeons. This belief in the necessity of adventure among ordinary lives is surely one of the great themes of American cinema. One

had thought that America was only able to give such classical stereotypes to the world—stereotypes of individualism, courage and beauty—because it was that 'kind' of democracy; but here they are, in much the same form, turning up in a Soviet movie. How extraordinary to find that actresses like Karavayeva (in *Mashenka*) and Melnikova (in *Flyers*) are as spicy and charming, as radiant and genial, as Stanwyck or Margaret Sullivan. One feels that this is an indigenous talent, which has nothing to do with pastiche; so that the traditional decencies have survived, even flourished, in some mysterious way we can't guess at, during the worst periods of persecution and suffering. The Soviet cinema opens itself up at such moments as vaster, stranger, more complicated than commentaries have allowed us to speculate.

At the NFI interview a member of the audience asked Raizman—whether provocatively or not I'm not sure—what he thought about Tarkovsky as a filmmaker. Raizman thought about the question carefully and then replied. He said that first of all, yes, he admired him; but considering the matter carefully he and Tarkovsky were rather different animals. Tarkovsky's films issued out of his own private experience and vision. The trouble was that there usually comes a moment when experience, *tout court*, ceases to sustain you. You would draw on that well, as it were, once too

often (not that this had happened with Tarkovsky). As far as Raizman personally was concerned, his own films had no burning vision or message to communicate. One simply did one's best to look and see; and what one saw, if one approached the matter intelligently, gave one sufficiently broad scope for manoeuvre. The artistic ideal, for Raizman, was a sort of irony or impersonality; with the artist effacing himself behind the densely packed reality of his portraiture. (Perhaps in this distinction is the difference between Chekhov and Dostoevsky.)

Raizman, one feels, would have been a fine artist anywhere, under any regime, because, in the end, he is (correctly) unaffected by 'ideas'. Another person in the audience asked about his 'philosophy'; and was politely reminded that if philosophy was what interested him, he would have done his best to become a philosopher. The artist's sole duty (dull as it may sound to say so) is to the facts; or, shall we say, to the facts' inner truth. Marxism-Leninism undoubtedly provided the framework of reference under which, in the years of his youth, Raizman came to understand the world. But the theory of the world and the world itself are never quite congruent. And when the two things fail to coincide, your instinct, if you are a certain kind of man, will be towards the enigmatic intransigence of the latter. Such, at any rate, after seeing his films and listening to him, is how I understand Raizman. ■

Berlin (1945).



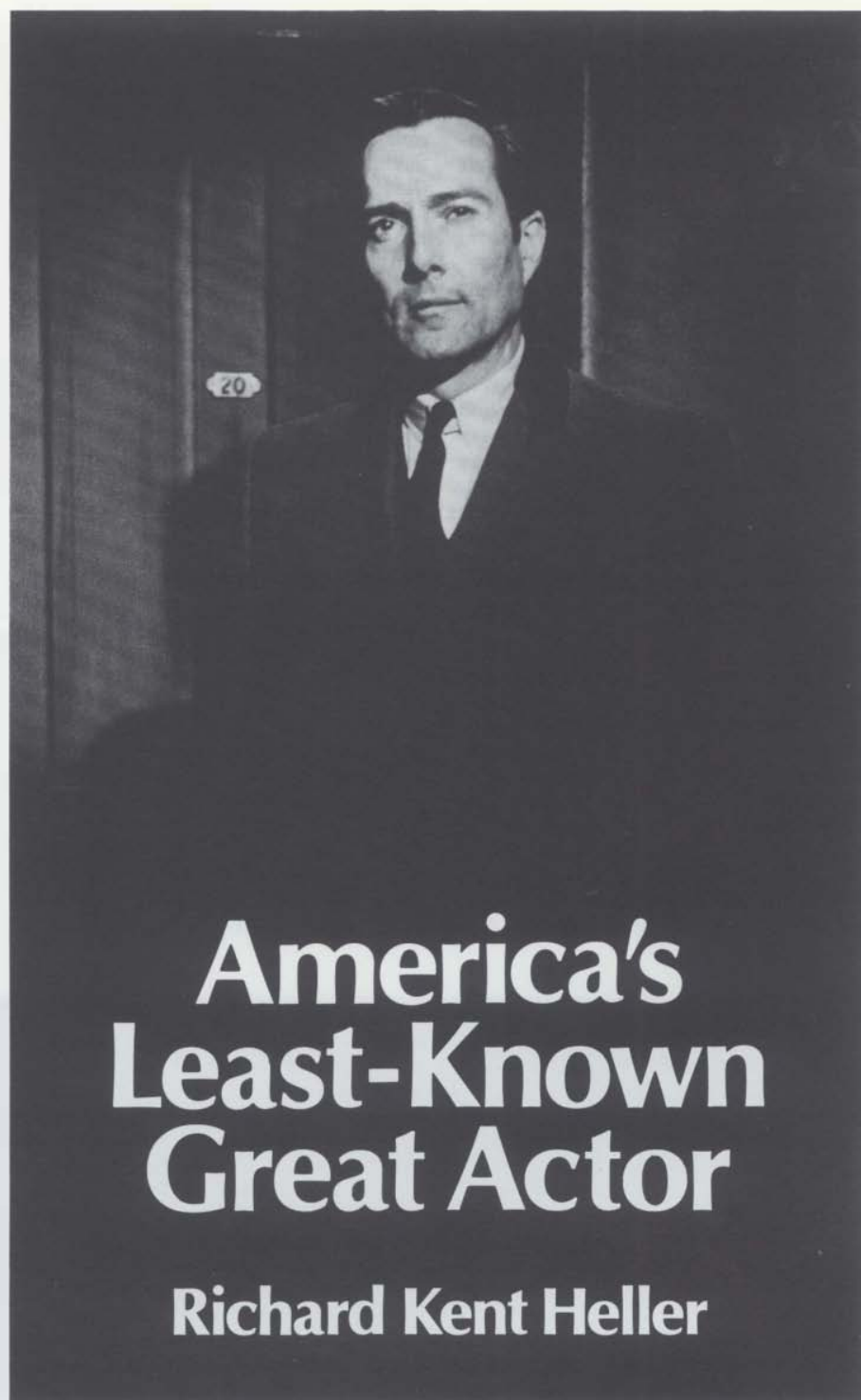
I have finessed myself into the reception past the sceptical press lady and two security men dressed as out-of-work majors in the prewar Romanian army. Now all I have to do is find a total stranger who was once a memorable Dorian Gray and stay with him while he receives a Special Achievement Award from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films.

But I recognise Hurd Hatfield at once. In a green dinner jacket descended from an Austrian archduke, Mr Hatfield is at the centre of an admiring circle of devotees of science fiction, denizens of fantasy, disciples of horror. Leslie Halliwell's *Film Guide* had referred to him as 'American leading man whose coldly handsome face proved to be his undoing.' This evening it seems an injustice: a warm smile plays over Mr Hatfield's indeed handsome face as he listens to a diminutive lady of great dignity and charm explain how he had inspired her to become an actress.

A series of announcements informs us that the awards ceremony is about to begin. They become progressively more testy. We are corralled into the auditorium by Miss Science Fiction Fantasy, an attractive blonde actress wearing a very tight, shimmering watery blue costume, like a truncated mermaid. After sundry delays the Academy presents its awards to the accompaniment of spectral music and disembodied voices. Most of them go to *Return of the Jedi*. One goes to Mr Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, past whose minions I swerve daily on Hollywood Boulevard.

Mr Hatfield's award is presented towards the end of the evening by Roger Felton, the director. He leads off with two memorable phrases: Hurd Hatfield, 'the male Garbo', and a singular tribute from Arthur Penn, Hurd Hatfield, 'America's least-known great actor.' He then makes a very long speech, obviously the result of devoted research, citing Hurd Hatfield's many credits on film, stage and television. At last Mr Hatfield actually receives the award, an immense golden object depicting the planet Saturn... Why? Didn't Saturn devour his children? A symbol of Hollywood? Hmm... Hurd Hatfield gets a genuine ovation. He makes a short, amusing, self-deprecating speech. Then, to another ovation, he gives way to other Saturns. The evening concludes with repeated photocalls, while the Romanian majors quietly remove the last freeloaders.

The next day I talk to Hurd Hatfield about the distinguished but enigmatic career behind the evening's award. I try to make sense of Arthur Penn's tribute—how does a man with such a career, and an international following, earn the title of least-known great actor? He is staying at the Bel Air home of an old friend. His Saturn gleams on a sideboard. Close to, he is spare and strikingly handsome: a distinct suggestion of Dorian Gray. He starts a leisurely guided tour of his career. He is friendly, loquacious and self-mocking, trying to suggest that his



America's Least-Known Great Actor

Richard Kent Heller

Mickey One (1965).

acting career was a series of accidents, that he really wanted to be somewhere else... 'I'm terribly lazy... I like doing everything but acting... I've done everything to ruin my career, I disappear for ages at a time...' The clue must be in where he disappears, but before I can ask he remarks, 'I've always been terribly lucky with my directors.' That is true. In films he has worked with Jean Renoir, Michael Curtiz, Victor Fleming, Arthur Penn (twice); on the Broadway stage with Elia Kazan (*Camino Real*, with an admiring Marlon Brando), Albert Marre, Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud; in television with Sidney Lumet and Arthur Penn (again).

We get down to some basic biography. Hurd Hatfield was born in Greenwich Village, New York. An only child, his

father was an attorney and former judge, his mother a self-taught painter and a descendant of the Irish hero Hugh Maguire, and of Thomas Jefferson. He was educated at Bard College, Columbia University until a scholarship took him to Dartington Hall, in Devonshire, to study drama under Michael Chekhov, nephew of Anton, actor, teacher and artistic heir of Stanislavsky. His voice becomes animated as he describes the influence of Chekhov, 'the one authentic genius I have met, a man who had seen an angel.'

Chekhov meant not only craft and discipline and encouragement but also 'contact with a world of spirits'. It also brought contact with White Russians, and meetings with Rachmaninov and with Tolstoy's daughter: 'I wish I could

show you a photograph. She looked very like her father, but when I wanted to photograph her she said, "No, I don't like my frock" (for which his voice, normally patrician American with a slight Irish lilt, shifts effortlessly to Russian Countess). With Chekhov he developed a talent for comedy and character parts: 'I loved being the clown in baggy trousers . . . and my favourite performance was Sir Andrew Aguecheek. I always wanted to go back to them, but then came Dorian Gray and I've been stuck with gentlemen' (faint curl of the lip) 'ever since.'

His performance as the icy, withdrawn, self-obsessed Dorian Gray made him an international star and began a cult which has spanned two generations. But by his account it was all an accident. 'I had done one movie, *Dragonseed* with Katharine Hepburn, who was terrifying, but I didn't mean to come to Hollywood at all. I came to Ojai to visit Iris Tree [daughter of Beerbohm Tree, and friend of Garbo, Chaplin, Aldous Huxley]. I was planning to do a play in New York by William Saroyan: instead my friends propelled me into an audition for Dorian Gray. I remember I was dressed terribly casually for those days, and I was driven to the audition in Iris Tree's car, from which goats had chewed the door handles. I auditioned for Albert Lewin, the director, and all I did was to improvise a monologue, which was just about unheard of, and then Albert Lewin floored me by asking me to audition again for the producer, Pandro Berman. You won't believe this, but I hardly knew then that films had a separate producer. Anyway, I repeated the improvisation for Berman and the next thing I heard was Berman and Lewin arguing about whether my hair should be cut.' (It was not.)

Then followed a screen test. 'The big courtroom speech by Franchot Tone from *Mutiny on the Bounty*. I looked at myself doing it and I could not believe it, I said "What is wrong with my mouth?"' Hard work soon tamed the over-mobile mouth (a legacy of the stage) and produced a memorable performance, in company with George Sanders and a young Angela Lansbury. 'It was exhausting . . . I had never had to play a part like that, cerebral and shut up in his own thoughts. Before that I was always clowns and characters. Dorian Gray was the first time I ever stood up straight.'

Dorian Gray cast a long shadow for more than thirty years. There was a string of film roles. Some were memorable: the young man of the house in Jean Renoir's *Diary of a Chambermaid*, Pontius Pilate in Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings*; and two for Arthur Penn, in *Left Handed Gun* as Moultrie, the reporter clinging to the life of Paul Newman's Billy the Kid, and as Castle, the mysterious tycoon in *Mickey One*. His latest role is an old priest in Bruce Beresford's *King David*. 'It's a character part. With a beard,' he adds with relish.

Never enamoured of Hollywood ('I've been in an earthquake, a landslide and a forest fire—it's all so impermanent'), he



The Picture of Dorian Gray (1944).

frequently forsook it for the stage, with roles ranging from Shakespeare to Sartre to Frederick Lonsdale. His performance in *Bullfight* was cited by Walter Kerr as one of the best of the year, while the *New York Times* praised the 'elegance and exaltation' of his performance in the US premiere of Whiting's *The Devils*—a performance he would like to repeat in London, which has never seen him live. In television outstanding performances included *The Count of Monte Cristo* for Sidney Lumet and an Emmy-nominated Baron Rothschild in *Disraeli*. I am still searching for clues to the career, and the disappearances, when he exclaims, 'Good heavens, you haven't seen the house!' I jump to my feet and gaze round the borrowed furnishings—but he is holding out some photographs.

Most show a house of exceptional beauty, inside and out, others a farmhouse of considerable charm. Both are in Ireland and both belong to him. They are two of a line of old houses lovingly restored over more than twenty-five years. The first was an eighteenth century whaler's cottage on Long Island. Ballinterry, his present house, is near Cork. His voice, which has been de-

tached, even whimsical, when talking about himself, becomes eager, even passionate, as he talks about his house. 'The Gaelic name means House of Witchcraft or Spells . . . it's very unusual for a house in Ireland, Queen Anne. I bought it from some farmers, it hardly had a roof . . .' We tour the house, by photographs, room by room, now pausing at the bow window, now admiring the ancestral four-poster bed, which has crossed the Atlantic four times, now examining Tsar Alexander's tea service . . . 'I would like to think that my ancestor Thomas Jefferson gave me my love of houses. Now do you understand why I kept disappearing throughout my career?'

I take my leave, though we have not completed the inventory of his furniture. 'Do you know I've nothing later than 1820 in my house?' We pass last night's award. 'You have now.' It may be hard to find a place for the garish golden Saturn in the Queen Anne house. But it belongs there. There is something nice about the world of science fiction, fantasy and horror pausing to honour the man who, between restoring beautiful houses, somehow snatched the time to become America's least-known great actor. ■



The Left Handed Gun (1958).

The critical terrorism which decrees that there is only one way to make a film usually extends its ukases to its own discourse on the medium. Yet there exist as many ways of writing about films as of making them; in view of which it might be time to rehabilitate the aphorism's 'shredded wit', taking as one's models Cocteau ('Le Coq et l'Arlequin') and Bresson ('Notes sur le Cinématographe').

There is less risk attached to calling a bad film a masterpiece than to calling a masterpiece bad, for in the first case the film, and the opinion, will soon be forgotten.

There are films which are *beyond criticism*—criticism has not yet caught up with them.

What critical analysis proposes are causes *after* effects.

An opinion can be shared, an idea can only be stolen.

When one calls somebody on the telephone, one hears a ringing tone and one's future interlocutor also hears a ringing tone. These may be almost exactly synchronous, *but they are not the same*. So it is with the critic and the artist, confronted with the latter's film.

Artists should be Christian: when criticised unjustly, they should *turn the other ear*.

To adapt Shaw: 'If you can, create; if you can't, become a critic.' Yet what else is the artist but a critic who confines his attentions to a single body of work: his own?

A film critic should have his inner eye tested every five years or so.

There are three stages in a critic's career. One, he is so enchanted to be asked to write about films that the question of remuneration hardly enters into it. Two, he cannot credit his good fortune at being paid to write about films. Three, he is outraged at being paid so little to write about films.

An actor, however versatile, can never convincingly portray a star if he is not one himself.

'Escapist' films have sometimes represented more of an escape for the stars appearing in them than for the audiences watching them.

A star is good on screen the way some people are 'good in bed'.

Stars are used most intelligently, not as cynosures but as decoys.

Aliens are now being used, as formerly were animals, to add 'human interest' to a film.

Bardot's influence on women's bodies was as revolutionary as that, three decades before, of Chanel on their clothes. She was a great and innovative *couturière* of the female anatomy.

A woman's body in representation, even in a pornographic film, is never 'naked', always 'nude'.

There are fashions in bodies, styles of nudity. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, that of Suzanna Hamilton was a raw, photoreportage, somehow post-holocaust nudity. She looked 'stark nude', as one says 'stark naked'.

Dietrich was a creature of the screen to such an extent that the *grain* of her snowy masklike features seemed a photographic grain; every frame of her life, so to speak, resembled a still by Horst.

Actors in the theatre must project, while actors in the cinema are projected.

Though the British cinema can claim many fine actors, there is one discipline most of them have not yet acquired, and that is how *not* to act. Consider a single frame enlargement from some British film—the actors in it, unlike their American counterparts, will still be seen madly acting away.

Even in their professional status film actors risk being typecast. If Gig Young, let's say, had ever played Hamlet, and

played it for all it was worth, he would doubtless have found himself nominated for Best Supporting Performance.

A film-maker (George Lucas, for example) who imagines himself as a typical spectator—now there's a novel way of underestimating the public's intelligence.

In the cinema, the future is for young people what the past is for an older generation—a source of nostalgia.

When two people see a film together, they are more likely to agree about its value than when they see it separately.

Never judge a person's intelligence by his taste in films.

Opera buffa. The confirmed movie buff tends to be more interested in Michael Curtiz, say, than in Dreyer or Mizoguchi. He is as wary of genius as a Hollywood producer.

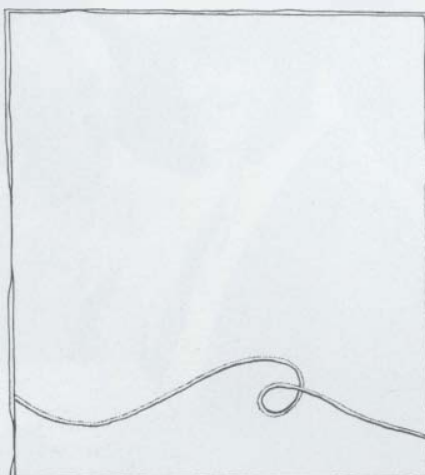
Watching *The Navigator* in an 'art cinema' and laughing out loud, I am told by a neighbour to make less noise. 'But it's a comedy!' I reply. 'It's not a comedy,' he snaps back, 'it's a *classic*!'

How thrilling to read about the shooting of a film, to anticipate its performances, its set-pieces, its overall 'look', to study the ads, posters and trailers which announce its forthcoming release. Whereupon it opens; it is reviewed (well or badly); and we end by seeing it (or not). It has, in short, become just another film. To release a film is, in a sense, to diminish it.

These days films are trimmed for television as tapestries used to be cropped in order to grace the drawing-room walls of fashionable ladies.

Why are we more indulgent with films when screened on television? Possibly because, in the cinema, we compare with the best we have seen; watching television, with the worst.

Eyes are vulnerable—'those tenuous instruments', as blind Borges called them—and film is vulnerable. And it is



The Critic, the Artist and the distance which separates them. Heurtebise after Cocteau.

the confrontation of two such vulnerabilities which makes the cinema such a poignant medium.

The cinema was lunar (black and white); it is now solar (colour).

The artists who are considered rich are generally those with a lot of small change jangling in their pockets.

There exist films born of immaculate conception: it is these which risk being crucified.

Underground cinema (often): contemplating other people's navels.

Fame, *Flashdance*, *Footloose*—but the cinema has still to find its Degas of leg warmers.

Most young artists are kleptomaniacs who have no use for what they steal.

An artist can only be imitated if he imitates himself.

Coleridge, according to legend, was interrupted in the composition of *Kubla Khan* by the inopportune arrival of 'a person from Porlock'. Hollywood has always imagined itself as Xanadu: it is, in reality, Porlock.

There are film-makers who have never 'sold out' solely because no one ever offered to buy.

The studio logos (MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia, and so on) were the cinema's Zodiac signs. (Not everyone, though, believed in astrology.)

Curious how many attributes cinematic academicism shares with the painterly variety—over-studied compositions, muddy brown colour tonality, etc.

A long film (in the pejorative sense) is long after five minutes.

There are films which are released—but only on parole.

Confronted with the work of certain film-makers, one would like to 'turn the meaning down', as one turns the sound down on a radio.

In the cinema, money has been devalued by inflation (nothing short of a billion dollars, for example, will satisfy the criminals in a heist movie). Yet Bresson, in *L'Argent*, could invest a mere handful of false banknotes with an extraordinary sense of reality.

Marcel Carné had a kitschy plaster statue of his star, Alain Cuny, designed for the final sequence of *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. Cocteau, by contrast, first 'patented' the Orpheus profile which became his trademark, then discovered a young actor (Jean Marais) with whose

physical features it uncannily corresponded. That is what is meant by 'getting one's priorities right'.

Slow motion is a microscope in which time is magnified; speeded-up motion is like peering through the wrong end of a telescope.

Certain film versions do not adapt plays, they expose them.

Some film-makers possess a system, as one says of gamblers; others adventurously bet everything they have on a single lucky number.

The cinema itself is unlikely to have a happy ending.

Fish despise swimmers and consider them dilettantes. Whether actor or director, critic or spectator, be a fish. Do not be a swimmer.

Do not dismiss generalisations. If nothing else, they offer a very precise insight into the mind of the person who makes them.

HEURTEBISE

Unlike cinematicerihews, Heurtebise's acrosticcriticism challenge did not fire up enough of his readers. Our thanks, however, to those who did submit items.—Editor.

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Picturegoes

BOB BAKER

The *Picturegoer* magazine was born in the summer of 1911. A couple of years later it amalgamated with *Pictures* to become, naturally, *Pictures and the Picturegoer*. The earliest copy held by the BFI library bears the apocalyptic date 22 August 1914 and has the somewhat extra-cinematic figure of Lord Kitchener balefully occupying the front page: 'The man we all rely on.' Later in the war, the magazine amended itself slightly to *Pictures for the Picturegoer*, continuing thus until 1921, when it transmuted into *The Picturegoer Monthly*. Ten years later, it changed into *Picturegoer*, a weekly, the first issue of which came out on 30 May 1931, the enigmatic smile of Marlene Dietrich decorating the cover. Early in the 1940s, it merged with a rival, *Film Weekly*, which was for a time incorporated in the masthead. It ceased publishing in April 1960, thus narrowly failing to make either its 29th or its 49th anniversary, depending on how strictly such things are reckoned.

Looking through the numbers published in the last ten years of its life reminded me of a performance of *Barefoot in the Park* I saw given a few years ago by the St Mary's Hospital Players. The audience consisted almost entirely of patients and it was plain that the staff nurses had been under instruction to ensure a good turn-out. The spectators were wheeled and carried into the converted lecture hall, which retained its colourful diagrams of the small intestine, and the evening began well enough. The Fonda and Redford surrogates bubbled away eagerly and the patients, grateful for a break from the awful tedium of life on the wards, responded as enthusiastically as their various physical states permitted.

About halfway through the second act it all began to crumble. A groan from the back of the hall was heard, then muffled sobs from down the front, cries for medication, for a bottle . . . Nurses, earlier hovering discreetly, were now moving about freely. The creak of trolley wheels and the flapping to and fro of the exit doors became impossible to ignore. On stage, Charles Boyer kept forgetting his lines, Redford's were inaudible and Fonda's relentless vivacity was rapidly turning into hysteria. Their audience was discovering excellent reasons for being elsewhere, and they had no idea what to do about it.

I didn't stay to see the end of *Barefoot*

in the *Park*, but the death throes of *Picturegoer* are recorded on paper by now starting to go dry and brown at the edges. The years 1950-60 were not in retrospect very dramatic ones, though occasionally seeming so at the time; but this was the decade in which the big audience deserted the cinema, and *Picturegoer*, with its increasingly nervous and erratic issues, complemented the decline as eloquently as a compilation of box-office admission tables, and far more poignantly.

In 1950, the British film industry's non-stop crisis seemed rather more intense than it had been for some years, with the Rank Organisation announcing a loss of £7 million and the postwar cinemagoing binge being clearly over. But since all previous slumps had been followed sooner or later by improvement and recovery, however temporary, the general mood among people whose livelihood depended on the cinema was at least no more suicidal than usual. In effect, this period can be seen as the phoney war; the blitzkrieg was still to come.

A 1950 *Picturegoer* reflects the complacency, the feeling of comparative safety, and not even indirectly does any hint of anxiety reveal itself. In accordance with its gender-less title, most of the paper's content seems to be aimed at men and women impartially. Teenagers as a separate and distinct audience had not quite yet been discovered: it's a magazine for Mum, Dad and anyone else in the family who might be interested. (Impossible to decide, incidentally, whether to call it a magazine or a paper. It's less than the one and more than the other, but no better term suggests itself.)

The issue dated 14 January is as good an example as any. The cover is in the manner of the formal glamour portraiture of the day. Inside, there is a discussion of James Mason's first Hollywood roles; an article about the current spate of American films on the subject of race prejudice ('problems that do not exist . . . in these islands,' drawled the voice of 1950); a puff for the latest Goldwyn discovery, Joan Evans; picture spreads on the latest Ladd, *After Midnight*, and on the British *Boys in Brown*; part one of a Hitchcock profile; plus reviews, letters, studio news and a quiz. And all for threepence.

Additionally, there is the only item

written overtly for women, a fashion page where Valerie Hobson discusses styles in lingerie. The advertisements, however, are almost without exception aimed, sometimes quite brutally, at women. 'What a pity! To risk losing half her teeth by the time she's 40 because of MOUTH ACID,' etc, etc. An explanation for this concentration of the advertisers' fire on one section of the readership may be found in *Picturegoer's* background. As part of the Odhams Press empire, it came under the same overall management as *Woman*, *Woman's Illustrated*, *Ideal Home* and *Woman's Realm*; presumably the massive advertising generated by these magazines spilled over into Odhams' other publications.

The reviews adopt the familiar rating system of zero to four stars, and critical comment is terse. The only film in the issue which retains much interest today is Anthony Mann's *Border Incident*, which gets one star. The top film of the week is Anthony Pelissier's adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rocking Horse Winner* (three stars), respectable British productions inevitably taking precedence over disreputable American thrillers. *Border Incident* is described as 'parochial in its treatment'.

Looking back across several decades at any periodical, one is bound to have to fight down a tendency to smugness. They didn't know what we know: that by the end of the decade Britain would have its very own race prejudice films, that Joan Evans would never become a star and that the critic had put his money on the wrong Anthony. Besides, in 1950 millions were still alive who could remember a time before the cinema existed, just as now there are millions who can remember a pre-television era. The excitement, the novelty still survived, as well as a sense that the medium hadn't yet suffered enough, that not enough awful things had happened to it.

But finally, the point the 1950 issues demonstrate most clearly is that films then still belonged to the family. It's one thing to know, as a matter of record, that families would routinely visit the cinema together. To read *Picturegoer* is to board a time machine and see it happening. One of the copies in my (secondhand) collection bears a rusty smudge at the top of one page where, I want to believe, it was once propped against a sauce bottle, while the guide to

current releases was consulted and the argument settled about which of the several local cinemas, none more than ten minutes walk away, was offering the most mutually tempting attraction.

Within a few years, that little tableau, cosy or squalid according to one's memory or disposition, was starting to dissolve into the past as inexorably as such commonplace features as tram-lines and bomb sites. Thousands upon thousands of television receivers were eating into the supports of the film business like the ants from *The Naked Jungle*. Evidence that complacency was becoming tinged with unease is first revealed by a 'Tell us what you think about tv' survey that *Picturegoer* ran in February 1952. The result as reported lacked the ring of conviction it would have had only a year or two before, and comes sprinkled with qualifiers: 'In general, it appears that picturegoers still prefer the pleasures of cinemagoing although television is . . . encouraging them to be more careful shoppers for their films.' So careful, in fact, that the first big wave of cinema closures was only a couple of years away.

By 1954, the exit doors had begun to flap in earnest. Mum and Dad were defecting from both picturegoing and *Picturegoer*, and the paper had begun to react by accommodating itself to a more youthful audience. The contrast between a number from 1954 and one from four years earlier is striking. The covers are sexier, the presentation racier, with as many as a dozen different typefaces on a page; the contents are more fragmented in the *Tit-Bits* manner, incorporating a variety of two- or three-paragraph

pieces fenced off by wiggly lines. And the editor had begun to employ younger writers, ones who knew better than to toss a word like 'parochial' into their copy; contributors about this time included Bryan Forbes, operating under various pseudonyms, a fast off the mark Michael Winner and the critic Margaret Hinxman.

The issue of 7 August has about 25 items of various lengths, plus the usual letters, reviews, etc. Some of the pieces are of a rather piquant triviality, such as one about Howard Keel's new nose or another by a man claiming to have seen 6,041 features since 1927. ('It took 3,625 visits to the cinema, cost £388 13s 10d.') Symptomatically, there's a 'Teen Spot' written 'by' Janette Scott, to whom apologies if the inverted commas are unjust. As for the reviews, the situation has turned round to the extent that an Anthony Mann now leads off the week, with *The Far Country* (three stars) being preferred to the Boultings' *Seagulls over Sorrento* (only two).

Most noticeable, though, is the way the general level of the contents is pitched much more towards the interests of women readers, which is to say the stereotypical perception thereof. The advertisements are as female-oriented as ever ('Holly-pax, the sanitary protection of the stars') but, as well, there are such articles as a piece of erotic gloating over Jacques Bergerac ('Bergerac—Romantic. Bergerac—Masterful') and a diary 'by' Rock Hudson about his visit to Ireland to shoot the exteriors for *Captain Lightfoot* ('Next week—What Rock thinks of Irish girls'). Quite clearly, *Picturegoer* was shifting

the direction of its appeal so as to bring itself into line with the adverts. Sheree North's polka-dot knickers on the cover and her leggy progression across the centre pages presumably represent an attempt to compensate the remaining male readership. The correspondence column comprises eleven letters from women, seven from men and a further seven signed by initials only. Share out these latter equally and possibly the ratio arrived at reflects that of the readership as a whole. But it does seem appropriate that the paper's editor is nowhere named—actually Connery Chappell at the beginning of the decade, but by this time Robert Ottaway; he also wrote the jazz column—and one can imagine the agonising over what direction to take that went on behind the scenes at 189 High Holborn—demolished, incidentally, a few years after the magazine it housed.

The impression of uncertainty is reinforced by another factor, one of the currents pulling at all the popular media of the day: the notion that vast areas of human experience were too embarrassing to mention and that terrible consequences would somehow follow if anyone strayed off the list of tacitly approved topics. Thus, like the film-makers themselves, *Picturegoer*'s writers had to solve the problem of how to appear to be hard-hitting without being so crass as to attack anything substantial. A perennial solution was the chastisement of some defenceless starlet ('Come off it, Eunice Gayson'). Otherwise, it was a case of a blustering style camouflaging a craven content. In 1954, Larry Parks came to Nettlefold



to make *Tiger by the Tail*, having been blacklisted in Hollywood ever since a HUAC appearance. It's difficult now to grasp the reality of that convention which, through a mixture of timidity, genteelism and protectiveness, made any mention by *Picturegoer* of the blacklist as unlikely as the subject of cancer being raised during *The Runaway Bus*. At any rate, the author of an article about Parks' arrival in Britain pondered the situation and declared, 'The plain facts are that for three years Larry Parks, who once breathed the rarefied air of Hollywood's upper strata, has not appeared before a camera; yet all that time thousands here would have probably preferred just one Parks picture to a dozen others that went their way. An inch or two under six feet tall...' Without exception, all related and comparable topics were similarly fudged or else outright ignored, and the idea that the shedding of such ludicrous coyness might represent salvation seems never to have occurred to anyone in authority, despite the lead in that direction from British films themselves.

The paper's crossroads years were 1957-58. Commercial television had swaggered on to the scene, treading a few hundred more cinemas underfoot, and *Picturegoer's* circulation was equally knocked about. Precise figures have proved impossible to come by, the relevant data apparently having been junked during Odhams' several later metamorphoses, first as part of the *Mirror* group and then as one of the components of the conglomerate IPC. However, a writer who was associated with the magazine thinks that the circulation about 1953 may have been over 500,000; and that as the decade drew to a close it was dipping below the 100,000 mark. At a time when Odhams and their rivals, Hulton's, Newnes and so on, were killing off old reliables like *Picture Post*, *Everybody's* and *John Bull*, phrases about axes and dead wood cannot have been far from the minds of anyone connected with *Picturegoer*.

Casting around for a solution, the paper seemed ever more confused about whom it was supposed to be aimed at. In fact, it never in its last years wholly committed itself in any direction, but gradually it did become clear that, with all sorts of contradictions and inconsistencies, it had begun to cater primarily for teenage girls who, moreover, were assumed to be interested in little above the level of wishy-washy trivia. And so the cinema moved in one direction while *Picturegoer* shambled off in another, one which quickly led it over the cliff edge.

The atmosphere of primness occasionally thinned a little. Derek Hill, warming up for his censor-baiting activities in the following decade, managed to contribute pieces on such dangerously alluring subjects as striptease and nudist films; but in general the proceedings were insipid. The house-style was frozen within the format that, approximately, no sentence be longer than twelve words and no paragraph



longer than two sentences. The characteristic hunting about for word-plays and rhymes—'Hold that Steiger', 'Rootin' for Tutin'—was relentless enough to satisfy the most pun-obsessed adolescent, the age group that was increasingly becoming the target of the advertisements ('Gone! The misery of pimples'). And films themselves began having to jostle for space with pop music.

Putting oneself in the place of the magazine's publishers, it's possible to see the logic of the course they took. The relevant periodicals of the time started, at one extreme, with *Film Fun*, a children's comic, while at the grown-ups' end there was *SIGHT AND SOUND*, *Films and Filming* plus, if you like, *Continental Film Review*. In the ground between, *Picturegoer* co-existed with Amalgamated Press' *Picture Show*, an odd little magazine which did not much more than wade through the plots of the latest releases, often in startlingly childish prose; and the ABC circuit's self-promotional monthly *Film Review*. Another comparable monthly, *Photoplay*, a rather soppy undertaking, had been terminated in the mid-50s. Over to one side and non-combatant lay such trade and specialised publications as *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Business Screen*. By marketing a film magazine for teenagers, the publishers may have seen themselves as being on a parallel course with that part of the cinema represented by low-budget rock musicals, many of which were turning a tidy profit. The fact that the teenagers who paid to see the films couldn't be persuaded to cough up for *Picturegoer* is only partly explained by the decision to follow old habits and aim primarily at a female audience. The other half of the story is that the *Picturegoer* team came nowhere near defining that audience or its requirements. Despite having the most flexible format in comparison with its competitors, it was *Picturegoer* that was the first to expire, admittedly preceding *Picture Show* by only a matter of months, led to catastrophe as surely as Humbert Humbert by the vain pursuit of adolescent girls.

That the paper was in a terminal condition became clear by 1959. The pages grew fewer as the content grew thinner, and only the reviews continued to justify an outlay of fourpence-halfpenny every Thursday. Margaret Hinxman, who became the review editor in 1955, managed to ensure that the vacillations and changes of tack of the paper as a whole did not affect her own territory, and the tone of the notices, their criteria and preoccupations varied hardly at all. Apart from answering the questions, 'What's it like? Is it any good?' in terms which would satisfy the customer in the Clapham cinema queue, the reviews mostly sought to place a given film in the context of its star's career, occasionally in that of its genre. Their unreliability lay in sometimes making a picture sound more important and attractive than it ever was, and the four-star rating, even the ultimate accolade, the Seal of Merit, became devalued through over-use, though outright aberrations—a Seal for *Shake Hands with the Devil*—were few. Under the Hinxman aegis, *Picturegoer's* infectiously enthusiastic review pages surely did nothing but good.

The last couple of years of *Picturegoer* inevitably seem rather tedious now, both intrinsically and because the magazine was no longer mirroring either its subject or any imaginable audience. The one curious development was that, on its very deathbed, the paper finally began to turn aggressive. Among all the anodyne vignettes on the doings of Marty and Ricky there started to appear little gobbets of rage, usually signed 'The Editor', anonymous as ever, castigating the censor for giving *Carry on Nurse* a mere 'U' certificate, advocating the abolition of the 'X' category and, instead, the banning of the generality of films which would previously have been so classified; and, most memorably, a sulphurous attack on Anglo-Amalgamated's *Horrors of the Black Museum*, described as 'corrupting and nauseating... bestial...'. Its makers were labelled 'a disgrace to the industry'. Since the most elementary market research must have shown that the audience for *Horrors*, and all its co-horrors, overlapped to a massive extent with the teenage audience which *Picturegoer* was supposedly accommodating, The Editor's indignation can only be seen as a death wish. And, indeed, within less than a year the wish was duly granted.

Spring 1960: it is announced that *Picturegoer* is changing into *Date*, 'the magazine for smart young women', thereby throwing out film and taking on a different identity, just as so many of the suburban family cinemas had been made over into printing works and machine tool factories. The final issue came out on 23 April, with a cover showing erstwhile chum Janette Scott acting out a smart young woman's fantasy: behind the wheel of a sports car, with a pop star in the back seat. *Date* waddled along for a year or so until it too shuddered to a halt and collapsed from lack of attention.

For anyone up and about at the time, the immediate appeal now of old copies of *Picturegoer* is to base nostalgia, particularly for the advertisements, which bring memories and associations bobbing to the mind's surface like debris from a sunken liner. Other little pleasures include the sense of having impinged on a parallel world, via those studio announcements that, for instance, Frank Sinatra will play the priest in *On the Waterfront*, that John Wayne is about to go on location with Huston for *Heaven Knows, Mr Allison* or that Yul Brynner is to direct his own production *The Magnificent Seven*, starring Anthony Quinn. A more melancholy variation on such fozzled intentions is provided by those articles proclaiming the impending stardom of some intriguing and attractive young player, which in fact constituted the furthest along the line to fame that he or she ever progressed. Race Gentry, Joan Elan, you are not forgotten. Rather harder to take are the pieces written in the heyday of those semi-stars whose careers either finished abruptly in a fatal car wreck or just petered out and ended in lonely suicide in a Pimlico bedsitter. An article on Janet Munro or Ronald Lewis in their lustrous phases now seems akin to the compulsive pornography of corpse shots in pictorial histories of the war.

The enquiry service offers comparatively unshadowed amusement. The compiler (one 'George' in 1950, sub-



sequently credited as Gordon Campbell) mostly dealt with questions like 'What was the name of the actress who . . .?' or 'Where were the locations filmed for . . .?' He also developed a tactful line for sorting out such misunderstandings as, No, Paul Robeson did not play a miner in *How Green Was My Valley*. But apart from this basic stuff, rummagers among the cinematic marginalia of the period can find rich pickings: 'Career-line, please, on Bobby Scroggins'; 'Why is Rita Moreno nicknamed The Feet?'; 'Title,

please, of the music always played over Russian items in Pathé News.' When *Picturegoer* finally went under, its chief mourners must have included the staff of the BFI Information Department, on whom devolved the drudgery of having to field such queries as how many times Daffy Duck had had his beak shot off.

The readers' letters over the years are fascinating on several levels, even if some of them suggest that Joe Orton or a confrère is chortling away behind a nom de plume, e.g. the character who breezily reports that Herbert Lom's autograph is eight inches long. Certainly genuine, however, is the enormous correspondence in which admirers pondered the latest manifestations of their favourite stars. 'Although I am a great fan of Doris Day, I wish she would do something about her posture. She seems inclined to push her head forward and downward. And this is more pronounced since she's had her hair shortened,' fretted Mrs Hooke of Tulse Hill on 15 March 1952.

Within only a few years, though, it was Billy Fury's posture and Edd Byrnes' haircut that exercised the letter writers, fewer and fewer of whom signed themselves 'Mrs'. A generation had emerged which would come to recollect its youth less in terms of the films it saw than of the discs it listened to and the television programmes it watched. *Picturegoer*, and the sort of picturegoing it had once celebrated, were dead and gone.

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George Byron Who?

Tom Stempel

The American Film Institute's Louis B. Mayer Library in Los Angeles recently took possession of the George Byron Sage Collection, and the four thousand items in it are not only historically noteworthy but more entertaining than most recent movies.

George Byron Who? The late George Byron Sage was a story analyst for Twentieth Century-Fox from 1941 to 1973. Each of the major studios (and nowadays most independent production companies) hires one or more (usually more, particularly in the heyday of the majors) people to read, prepare synopses

of, and comment critically on the thousands of items submitted as potential subjects for films. Sage was not only a meticulous reader but he also kept copies of each report he prepared, and it is these copies that make up the collection.

The first impression one gets from it is the enormous variety of material submitted to a studio. One expects to find reports on original screenplays, published novels and the galleys of soon-to-be-published novels, stage plays and even short stories, but there are also, to name a few of the odder submissions: travel books both published and in manuscript, one-act plays, a libretto for an opera, outlines for novels, an outline and a personal scrapbook on the subject matter, a collection of newspaper articles, a research outline, a history book, articles both published and unpublished on historical subjects, a script for a TV musical show, court records of a trial (submitted by one of the lawyers on the case), radio scripts, a factual story privately published, unproduced radio, stage and television plays.

One cannot also help but be impressed by the astonishing amount of junk submitted. Linda Segal, a reader for Columbia Pictures, was recently quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* as saying, 'If people think the movies they see are bad, they should see what I have to read.' What is equally surprising is that while some of the terrible material came from the (would-be) writers themselves, most of it was submitted through supposedly reputable agents. The suspicion arises that the agents often submitted material knowing it was terrible, but did so to pacify a client. By the late 60s, when the amount of incoherent material submitted had risen alarmingly, Sage wrote about one piece, 'Submission[s] such as this do nothing but discredit the responsibility and judgment of the agent who makes the presentation. If there

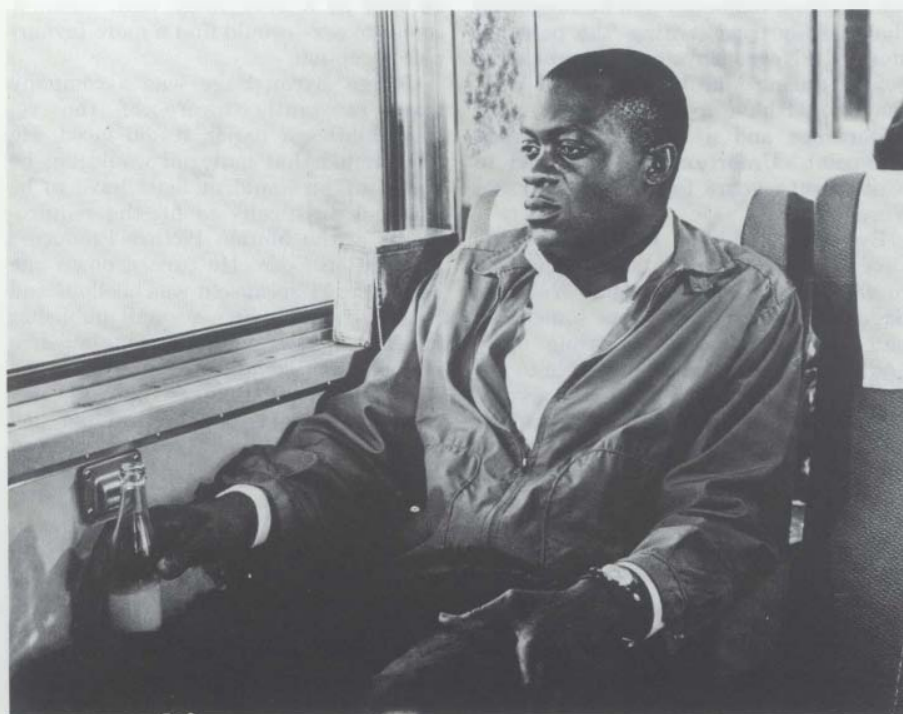
is any excuse for submitting such extremely unlikely material—which seems doubtful—the agent should send along some explanation with the submission.'

The major element George Byron Sage was looking for was a *story*. Partly this may have been Fox's traditional emphasis on story over stars, but it also seems to have been the realisation that American movies tell stories. While stars may bring in the audiences, it is the story that holds them and sends them out of the theatre satisfied. Many times potentially interesting ideas were submitted, but Sage was ruthless in pointing out when there was not, or not yet, a story. Frequently writers submitted historical and biographical material about people as varied as General Joseph Stilwell and singer Josephine Baker, but Sage's comment was invariably that the material had not been developed into a story. (There are still efforts, still unsuccessful, to do a film about Baker.)

In the 40s the submitted material often had a point if no story (the galleys of an autobiography of an employee in the Department of Agriculture, for example), but by the late 60s and early 70s many submissions were merely incoherent. In 1969 Sage described a story submitted by director Nicholas Ray as 'strange and bewildering'. He added, 'Personally I must state that it is one of the most completely hopeless scripts I've ever seen . . . although Mr Ray might be the perfect director for the picture, it is obvious that somebody else will have to work on the script before there is any hope for a production.' (The story was about a group of escaped convicts. One of the convicts masterminded the escape to recover his stolen loot. A second convict, who looked like the first, developed amnesia during the escape and could not remember whether he was in fact the first or second convict . . . one can see how a script of that might be 'bewildering'.)

What Sage was looking for, in addition to a strong story, was material that would be acceptable to a mass audience. The story was the key, but there was also the question of characters. In 1949 he recommended no on an autobiography of a conscientious objector during World War II. It was not so much that the man had been a co but that from the book he seemed 'extremely confused and maladjusted' and was 'unable to get along with anybody', including the Mennonites who ran the co camp and the lawyer who handled co cases.

Sage was understandably sensitive to social considerations in potential film material. Fox had a tradition of making films about controversial subjects (*The Grapes of Wrath*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Pinky*) and Sage and the studio



The Liberation of L. B. Jones
'Such a film is inevitable . . . and it is just as true that the first such film will be the one that will win commercial success . . .'



were aware of the difficulties in presenting such films given the nature, the attitudes and even the prejudices of the mass audience. In 1946 he reluctantly recommended against purchase of a book about a Nisei who fought for the Air Force in World War II. In May 1950 he had doubts about the commercial aspects of a story of displaced persons from World War II being brought to the United States. He wrote:

There are many social and economic factors that would have to be considered before it becomes a film . . . It is propaganda, of course, designed to create sympathy and understanding for many unfortunate people of the world. From a humanitarian view this is admirable. But from a commercial standpoint it is necessary to be a little cold blooded. As far as the general public is concerned, the idea of bringing ops to America in such large numbers is still not very popular. This may be shortsighted and it may be the wrong attitude, but such feelings on the idea exist and any attempts to sell the public such an unpopular idea through a film is unlikely to meet with much commercial success.

The authors of the story reworked it and resubmitted it in September 1950. Sage admitted the treatment was better, but noted that the beginning of the Korean War that summer meant 'the subject matter has been overshadowed by wars and the prospect of total war.'

Sage's comments over the years provide a vivid look at the change in American racial attitudes. In 1946 he recommended against Erskine Caldwell's novel *A House in the Uplands* on the grounds that the 'sexual maladjustment of the leading character' (he is white and prefers sleeping with 'high yellow' girls in the Negro quarter) 'would be impossible to present on the screen.' Three years later Fox released *Pinky*, and eight years later *Carmen Jones*, the latter

with an all-black cast. Two years after *Carmen Jones*, Sage covered a suggested all-Negro Western, noting that the author, Austin H. Taylor, seemed to have 'overlooked the fact that Negroes would be completely incongruous to the setting and the period of a Western.' He also noted that while the novice author had provided roles for Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte (the stars of *Carmen Jones*), he saw himself in the best part in the film.

In 1957 Belafonte appeared in Fox's *Island in the Sun*, in which he had a very chaste affair with a white woman, and the film was heavily criticised in the South. That same year Belafonte and another writer, James O. Killens, submitted a story that Sage considered an old-fashioned melodrama of slavery in the Old South. Sage said that Belafonte's talents deserved better and he suggested that if they tried writing 'the personal story of a Negro slave and his problems, before, during and after the Civil War, they would have a story of permanent importance and a story with a fresh viewpoint.' Unfortunately, that had to wait twenty years for Alex Haley and *Roots*.

By 1963-4 and the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, the studio was receiving more stories about Negroes. Sage noted that the writers sometimes had difficulty finding a strong story and one that might be acceptable to the audience by the time it got to the screen, given the time taken by film production and the speed with which attitudes were then changing. In 1964 he commented on a screenplay based on Gordon Parks' autobiographical novel *The Learning Tree*. Sage liked the novel and the script, but wondered if the public was ready for it, concluding 'The answer would seem to be outside Hollywood.' The film was made by Warner Brothers in 1969 and was not a popular success.

In early 1965 Sage reported on the

Jaws

'I don't think this is the sort of big fish story we need at the present time.'

novel *The Liberation of Lord Byron Jones*:

It is the first novel that I have seen that deals with this type of story material in a way that provides a basic springboard for a motion picture. A picture touching on issues of Civil Rights can be done, it seems to me, if there is first of all a basic dramatic concept involving something more than social problems. This novel provides such a concept . . . such a film is inevitable—regardless of anyone's personal opinions about social issues—and it is just as true that the first such film will be the one that will win commercial success if it is done right.

The film of the novel was not done at Fox but at Columbia in 1970 and was not commercially successful, probably because its thunder had been stolen by the Sidney Poitier films of 1967 *To Sir, With Love* and, especially, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*?

In 1968 Sage dealt with two submissions within a month about Negro soldiers in the Old West. By then the idea of Negroes in the West was no longer 'incongruous' to him or to the audience, and in a second page of one report he described other films and books about the subject. By 1970 he was even more aware of the demands of the black audience and/or pressure groups. In commenting on a screenplay about a runaway slave, he noted that William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* 'still remains unproduced, ironically enough because it didn't please black racist groups. It therefore seems unlikely that this story of Big George, in which a Negro character is portrayed as an excessively violent and crude man—as well as a very lusty man when it comes to sex—would find a more favourable reception.'

George Byron Sage was a company man, constantly aware of the responsibilities a major studio faced. He often noted that material would not be suited to, or would at least have to be changed drastically to fit, the requirements of the Motion Picture Producers Association Code. He turned down one book in 1951 because it was libellous and he noted that while a small publisher might get away without being sued, a major studio could not. He also turned down an anti-Communist film in 1950, noting that others of that kind had died at the box-office. He noted when material might be considered offensive to people and to specific groups in the United States and abroad (he wrote in one report that the reason American Revolutionary War films were generally not made was that they would not be considered marketable in Britain). Sage had a keen eye for material that was similar to films being done by Fox and other studios, and being a good company

man, he nearly always wrote that the Fox film was better. (Once, on a 1952 submission entitled 'The McNeill Rangers', which had appeared as an article in the *West Virginia History* magazine, he did admit that the submitted material was better than a film, *The Raid*, the studio then had in production.)

He looked for material for the stars Twentieth Century-Fox did have. He reported one story might be suitable for Carmen Miranda 'for whom it isn't always easy to find the right material.' He was, however, protective of the stars. In 1950 he reported on a story that could only work on the screen with Susan Hayward, but he also said, 'I feel the picture needs her a lot more than she needs the picture.' By the early 70s, the necessity of attracting stars to make films meant the studio considered material that years before it might have disregarded. On a baseball story in 1973 he wrote, 'It's one of those roles that Burt Reynolds will see himself playing in the event that the manuscript gets to him... and in this case maybe we'll have to give it more consideration than it really merits.'

Sage's comments over the years reflect the changes in what were acceptable subjects for a major studio to produce and release. In the 40s and early 50s, much material was not recommended because it was not the kind of thing a major studio would want to put its name to. In the 50s the material began to change. In 1955 Sage reported on a script entitled *Python!*, in which a woman uses a python to kill off her real and imagined enemies. Sage wrote, 'There is little reason to comment on material like this.' It was exactly the sort of thing low-budget producers and studios, particularly American-International, were having some small, in comparison with major studio grosses, success with. Because of the shift which began in the 50s to making films for the teenage market, it was also the kind of material that would come to dominate American films, both major studio and independent releases, some twenty years later.

In the late 50s and early 60s Sage was frequently writing that certain stories would be better done, not by the majors, but by low-budget producers without stars. These stories were not only exploitation material like *Python!* and the 1958 submission *I Was a Teenage Jekyll and Hyde*, but also potentially challenging and controversial material. In the 40s and 50s Sage's reaction to daring material was often that the studio could not take the commercial chance unless there was some other interest shown in it. On the 1946 Nisei story, he suggested that while the audience might not be ready for it, a book might pave the way for making the subject acceptable in the mass market. This was not simply a question of the publicity of a bestseller or hit play, but of a less expensive medium breaking new ground in making audiences aware of a subject. Frequently Sage suggested that a book,

a play (either on Broadway or, in the 50s and later, off-Broadway), or a low-budget film made independently might help to create an interest that would lessen the financial risks for a major company.

As would be expected from anyone who worked in the movie business for thirty years, Sage did occasionally blow one or two. He recommended against *Jaws* in 1973 on the grounds that the subplots (which were eventually eliminated from the film) made adaptation difficult and that 'Somehow I don't think this is the sort of big fish story we need at the present time.' He also recommended against George Lucas' first, very rough draft of *American Graffiti*. If the accuracy of his synopsis is up to his usual rigorous standard one can see why: there is a lot of talk about cars, Carol (played by Mackenzie Phillips) is nowhere to be found, Curt just wanders around without being kidnapped by the Pharoahs, there is no final drag race and Lucas apparently failed to make it clear exactly how the music was to be used in the film. Maybe Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz deserve a little more credit than they have been given.

This does not mean that for all Sage's clearly middle-class values (and it was because of those values, shared by the audience, that he was valuable to Fox and remained there for over thirty years) he was reluctant to take chances or that he did not recognise a potentially good script or a good writer when he saw one. Sage was an early partisan of William Goldman's script for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. He read a very rough draft that ran 171 pages

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

'One can hope that Goldman will learn more about the basic technique of the business of screenplay writing ...'

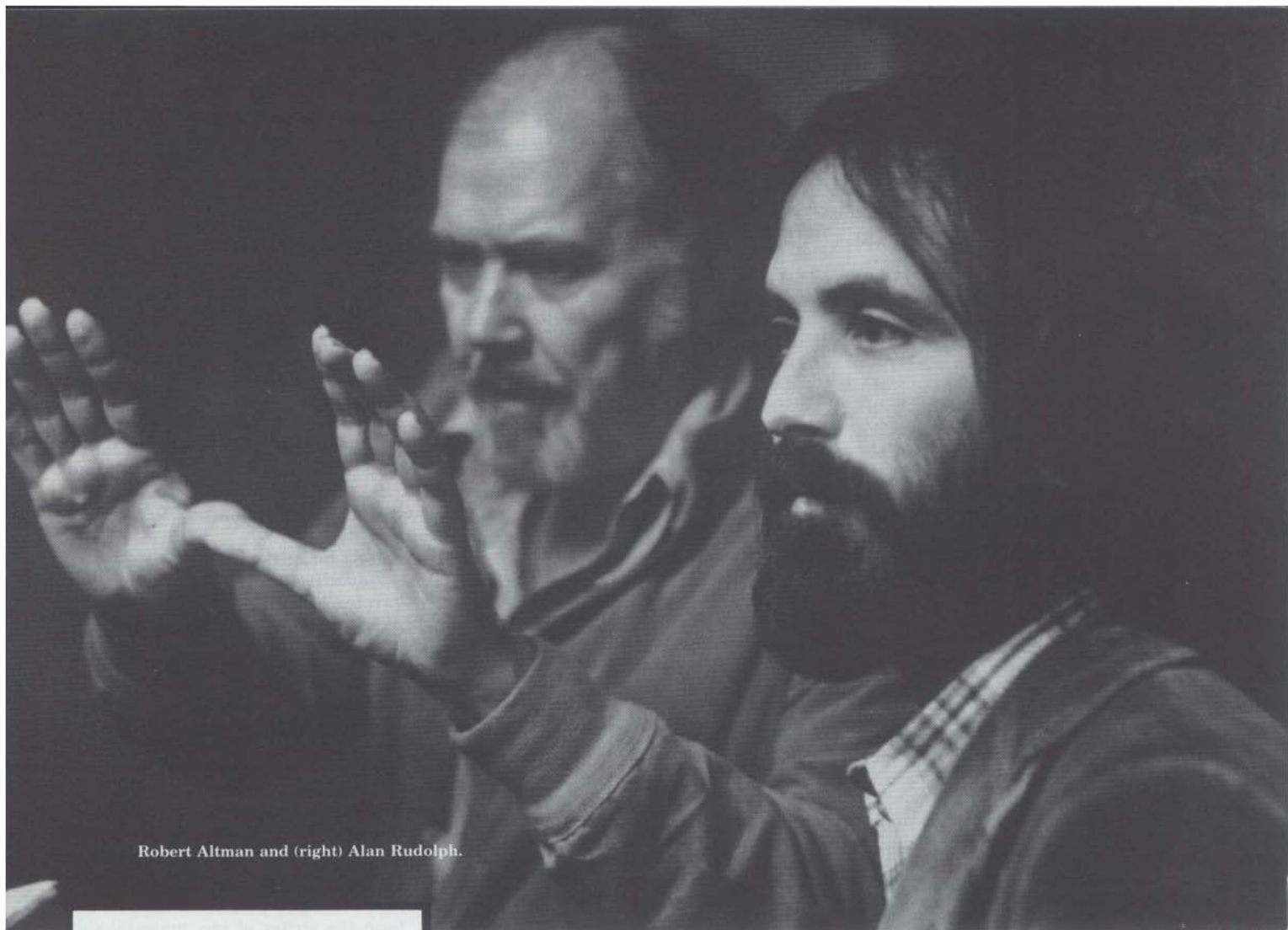
and included long sequences cut from the final script. As he later wrote, 'I covered the early version of the *Butch Cassidy* script and encouraged it—at a time when it had no friends—and subsequently covered the version that was purchased, which could be recommended without reservations.' He had noted, however, on the earlier draft, 'One can hope that Goldman will also learn more about the basic technique of the business of screenplay writing in the process of such work [revising the screenplay]. It's clear he *feels* many of the scenes himself, but he doesn't know how to put them down on paper—and what he puts down demands more reading patience than most people can give him.' (Would-be screenwriters should keep that in mind the next time they read one of Goldman's essays on how unimportant screenplay format is.)

In 1963 he read a screenplay adapted from *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. While he wrote, 'Morally this screenplay is shocking and revolting,' he added, 'Dramatically it is... completely absorbing and utterly fascinating... it is the most brilliant dramatisation of the very challenging novel we are likely to see.' He was baffled, however, because he had not heard of the writer before. He asked:

But who is this writer? This is something turned out by a man of experience, yet the Story Department files have absolutely nothing in the way of credits for [this writer]—there isn't even any indication that he has been the writer of any material submitted to us in the past... I think we have a right to know his identity. If he is a new writer for the screen—as our records indicate—his talent is something the entire industry will, eventually, recognise.

The industry did. The writer was Francis Ford Coppola.





Robert Altman and (right) Alan Rudolph.

TOM MILNE

on *Choose Me*
and the career
of its director
Alan Rudolph

'...as suggestive as a neon orchid'

When Alan Rudolph's *Welcome to LA* first appeared out of the blue in 1977, prevailing opinion seemed content to pigeonhole the film rather disparagingly as a) pretentious, and b) Altman-derived. Looking back from the vantage point of five subsequent films, that judgment, it must be admitted, now looks substantially correct, even though it signally failed to acknowledge the unmistakable arrival of a new filmmaker on the scene.

Altman-influenced *Welcome to LA* undoubtedly was, not unnaturally since Rudolph had not only served a long apprenticeship (assistant director on *The Long Goodbye*, *California Split* and *Nashville*, co-scriptwriter on *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*), but was manoeuvring a cast of Altman veterans, with music as their guide and *raison d'être*, through the interlocking subplots of a kaleidoscopic narrative in the manner of *Nashville*. 'Pretentious', as

always, is rather more problematic.

Talking about the genesis of *Welcome to LA* out of one of Richard Baskin's songs, Rudolph noted that its visual style was initially sparked by the work of artist Jack Beal, a surrealist who 'does people in patterns in an ultrareal way but not quite real at all.' Fair enough as a description of the film's extraordinary vision of Los Angeles, not so much the city of angels as 'the city of one night stands', as a kind of coldly despairing limbo seemingly peopled by no one but the film's cast, going eagerly about the business of hustling their livings and their relationships: a perpetual movement, as with the mysterious carousel in *La Ronde*, in which the quest to touch emotions even momentarily with another person is doomed to failure.

But Rudolph went on to explain a little further: 'And all I've ever wanted to do is to show reality through an unreal set of eyes. I wanted to create an unreal movie about reality.' He creates

the unreal movie all right, but reality is a little shy in making its appearance. Chief reason for this is the somewhat arbitrary, artificially contrived existence of the characters, who come to the film trailing echoes of Altman conceptions and are not allowed to exist so much as to suffer being shuffled around in illustration of a sociological thesis about the alienations of contemporary life. Keith Carradine's systematic progress from bed to bed with each of the female characters may be intended as a reflection of his identity crisis in relation to his father and to his music, but it emerges more like a convenient device designed to highlight the emotional problems all the other characters are having. And since none of them elicits much sympathy in the viewer—less because they emerge as querulously self-seeking than because they are merely abstract symbols in the working out of an equation—*real* feelings are never really in question, either on their part or on the spectator's.

At one point in the film, interloping more by virtue of the actress than the director, there is one shot of Geraldine Chaplin, briefly communicating a basilisk glare of genuine despair, which might almost be a flash forward to *Remember My Name*. Elsewhere in *Welcome to LA* she is condemned to duplicate her Altman clown persona (*Nashville*, *A Wedding*) as the neglected wife who fancies she is dying and demonstrates it by languishing in a series of extravagant Camille poses. In *Remember My Name* it is as though the same character, tired of decorating a world of soulless abstraction, had escaped to play a more dangerous game by hounding to the brink of destruction the man who betrayed her. This darkly avenging angel of Rudolph's second film may be no less unreal than the fluttering Camille in his first, but the end product this time is, unmistakably, a raw emotional reality.

A liberating film in more ways than one—almost an acknowledgment on Rudolph's part that he had tried to run before learning to walk—*Remember My Name* is a brilliantly realised exercise in classical disciplines. In place of the elaborately intellectualised schema of *Welcome to LA*, a unilaterally straightforward revenge plot that might have served as a Joan Crawford vehicle; instead of the portentous sociological comment offered by Richard Baskin's songs, the eloquent simplicity of Alberta Hunter's blues. Again an unreal world—separate burrows, or urban solitude and domestic bliss, connected with serpentine menace by the trajectory of Geraldine Chaplin's car coming from one to destroy the other—whose emotional truth becomes devastatingly real.

After which, having won his own spurs as it were, Rudolph seemed to mark time through a slice of backwoods pop culture (*Roadie*, 1980), exploitation horrors with political-ecological overtones (*Endangered Species*, 1982), and a bizarre ideological road show with Gordon Liddy playing straight man to Timothy Leary's red-nosed comedian (*Return Engagement*, 1983). None of these films is exactly negligible (with *Return Engagement* offering extraneous fascinations), but all seem curiously marginal to the line of development that resurfaced with *Choose Me*, a film which revises and corrects *Welcome to LA* in the light of *Remember My Name*. The very title, though obviously not so intended, serves as a reminder that, subjected to a rigorous schema, the characters in *Welcome to LA* enjoyed nothing so basic as freedom of choice.

Choose Me has a schema of sorts too—everyone is in search of emotional fulfilment, only to find that it isn't necessarily there just for the asking—but it is both elaborated and denied by the characters themselves, who sometimes play by the rules and sometimes seem unaware that there are any. A romantic fairytale, unpredictable in the way of fairytales within their very predictability, it captures from the outset the sense of disillusioned

enchantment that Coppola lumbered in pursuit of throughout *One From the Heart* and Jean-Jacques Beineix gradually frittered away in *The Moon in the Gutter*. A sleazy studio street set by night, illuminated by a cyclorama moon and the red neon sign of Eve's Bar, sparsely populated by the odd hooker, pusher and late customer or two who gradually resolve themselves into an impromptu dance as the camera pans over the cityscape to pick out a single face in close-up: Dr Love (Genevieve Bujold), adulated sex counsellor of a phone-in radio talk show, dispensing the wisdom that has made her a star. Between them, the title song ('... and if you choose me, then you're my choice') and Dr Love's voice ('There's really no mystery to sex, Tom, but there may be to her') begin to orchestrate the theme that emotional contact is so easy except that people make it so difficult.

Into the bar walks a young man (Keith Carradine), trailing an enigmatic history of lost loves and estranged wives, at least one of them dead. Looking for Eve, he finds her behind the bar, only it isn't the same one. The first Eve evidently shot herself over an unhappy love affair, and the present one (Lesley Ann Warren) stepped into her shoes during a low ebb in her life (possibly as a prostitute) when she walked past and saw her name up in lights. This is merely the first in a series of signs and portents—the most crucial being an intimation of death involving a girl, possibly a memory haunting

Carradine, which seems destined to return as reality at the end of the film—which turns *Choose Me* into a darker echo of Demy's *Lola*, with its own variant 'rondo galant' as the Carradine character tenderly and impetuously proposes marriage to each of the girls he encounters at the bar: Eve, who has no shortage of men but fears the commitment of a continuing relationship; Dr Love/Nancy, who has the stability Eve lacks but who is afraid of sex; and Pearl (Rae Dawn Chong), more balanced than either, but in love with an unfaithful husband who treats her as a sex object in no need of sweet-talking.

In a sense, Carradine's Mickey is a direct counterpart to the dazzlingly white-suited Michel (curious coincidence of names) who returns from the South Seas, bearing fabled treasures of riches and romance, to bracket *Lola* with fleeting appearances that promise a happy ending to all the heartbreak of waiting and hoping. But more appropriately to a more downbeat film where the unreal world is to become real, Mickey's treasure is altogether more ambivalent. To begin with, by his own admission and by diagnosis in the mental institution from which he is first seen making his escape, Mickey is a pathological liar. Shooting the line to the women he meets, he certainly comes on like one of the best, stringing together a curriculum vitae that takes in dizzying heights of derring-do and distinction as professor of poetry at Yale,

Choose Me: Keith Carradine and Genevieve Bujold.





Welcome to LA: Lauren Hutton.

jet pilot, industrial engineer, spy in Soviet Russia and star magazine photographer, not to mention gambler and madman. With equally dizzying casualness, in a scene where Bujold furtively riffles through his suitcase, the film then displays incontrovertible evidence which not only supports the truth of all his claims but suggests a logical sequence of career events.

It is certainly no accident that, in the copy of the *Yale Review* briefly disinterred from the suitcase, Mickey's name is appended to an article on Nabokov. A warning not to take the seems for the is, perhaps. All three women, when faced with Mickey's precipitous proposals of marriage, react

with disbelief in varying degrees. To which Mickey disarmingly counters: 'I only kiss women I'd marry, and when I marry them I never cheat.' A Nabokovian liar indeed, Mickey seems to suffer perversely from a compulsion to tell the truth. He plays, you might say, the holy fool whose belief in doing what comes naturally is opposed to the rationalisations applied smugly by Dr Love and anxiously by Eve. By bedding Dr Love, Mickey persuades her that sex isn't so difficult after all; and in not bedding Eve, he wins her round to the belief that she might indeed be capable of sustaining a permanent relationship. But what of Pearl, the third of Mickey's three graces? Loving her husband Zack

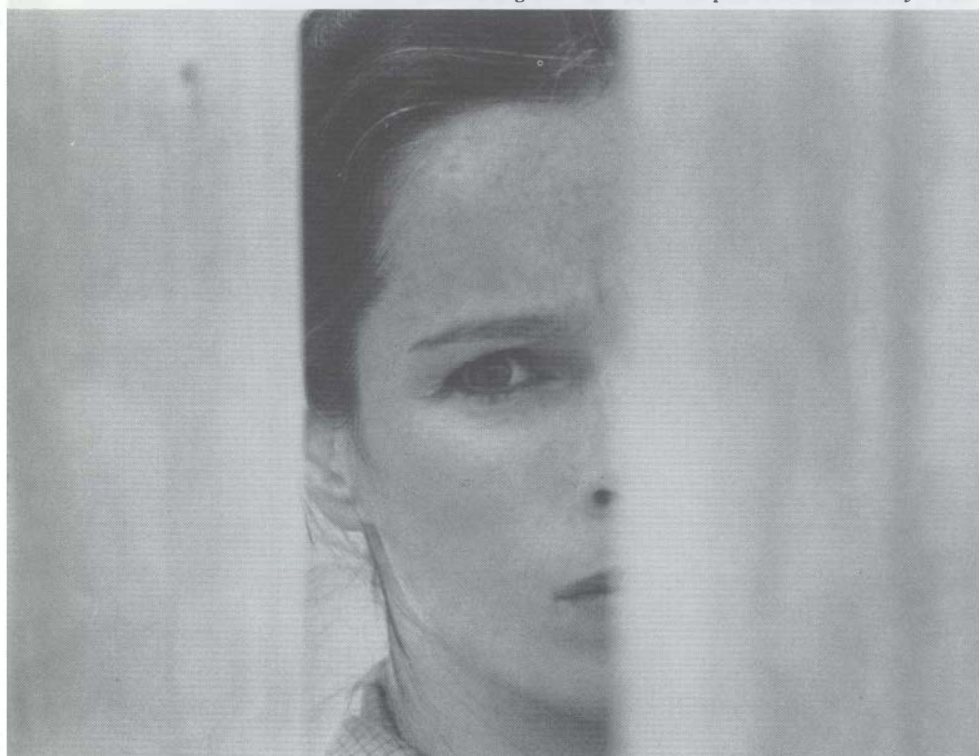
and therefore neither needing nor heeding Mickey's overtures, she appears to disrupt the fairytale symmetry by winning nothing more than a black eye from Zack (Patrick Bauchau).

Zack, it should be noted, is a gambler rather more incensed by the fact that Mickey cleaned him out at poker than by his discovery of Mickey trying to photograph Pearl in innocently compromising circumstances which, to Zack, suggest post-coital perversion (he shares with Mickey a curious innocence). As a gambler, and as a husband whose neglect of his wife remains unchanged, Zack is another of the teasing signs which litter the film, this time suggesting a subterranean kinship with Mickey, who claims to live in Las Vegas (that curious limbo which looms less as a place where people come from than one where gamblers go to). Throughout the film Mickey is seen sporadically trying to raise the cash for a bus ticket to Vegas, where he has money and where—almost a litany, this—everything will be all right if only he can get there.

At the end he makes it, or at least is last seen on the Las Vegas bus with a radiant Eve, whom he has just saved from attempted suicide on the roof of her bar (with an empty gun but in circumstances uncannily echoing a tragic gunshot from the past). It's a happy ending, but given the stoic resignation with which Mickey is already behaving—'Marriage is a very sacred thing,' croons the motherly old black woman sitting alongside to whom Eve proudly shows off her wedding ring. 'Yes,' says Mickey after a time, 'in a sordid sort of a way it is'—one wouldn't give a damn for its chances of ending happily. Or perhaps one would. It is, quite literally, a gamble.

The delight of *Choose Me* is that while seemingly spinning airy nothings but actually weaving a deceptive tapestry that depicts either dark disenchantment or sunny optimism depending upon point of view, Rudolph has got everything right. The songs, by a cohesive variety of composers, are as allusive as Richard Baskin's for *Welcome to LA* but much less constrictingly intrusive. The evocatively counterfeit settings, as suggestive as a neon orchid (to borrow a phrase from the *Los Angeles Times*) as those in *One From the Heart*, nevertheless spring out of the earth instead of proclaiming their plastic provenance. The characters, enacted by a superb cast in which Carradine, Bujold and Bauchau are outstanding, are granted a life of their own beyond the strict demands of the narrative (note, in particular, the bartender played by John Larroquette, who serves strictly as a plot device yet still has space to live his own little tragedy). And, just in case the foregoing conveys an impression of solemnity, there is plenty of fun to be had out of the sharply good-natured satire of chat-show gurus, and from a wittily pointed string of one-liners ('I'm not afraid of death. At least you get laid in your coffin'). It is, in short, Alan Rudolph's best film to date, and bodes a bright auteurist future. ■

'A basilisk glare': Geraldine Chaplin in *Remember My Name*.



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Insignificance: Michael Emil (Einstein) and Theresa Russell (Marilyn).

Shape of the Universe

Insignificance/Tom Milne

By inference if not by positive identification, Nicolas Roeg's *Insignificance* (Palace Pictures) is a rondo for four stars from assorted galaxies, encompassing Albert Einstein (Michael Emil), Marilyn Monroe (Theresa Russell), Joe DiMaggio (Gary Busey) and Senator McCarthy (Tony Curtis). At one point, trying to describe the shape of the universe for Marilyn's benefit in the kindergarten terms she had earlier used to propound the theory of relativity for him, Einstein suggests that she imagine taking a completely solid object and then turning it completely inside out upon itself forever. It's as good an image as any for the extraordinarily open-ended, ever-changing density of Roeg's movies in general, and *Insignificance* in particular, which rolls along gathering momentum like some enigmatic ball, seemingly going nowhere yet arriving everywhere as it explodes in a shower of illumination.

The time is 1954, a year in which Marilyn Monroe's career was beginning to crest, divorce from DiMaggio was in the offing, and the mixed blessings of her self-improvement programme via psychoanalysis and the Actors' Studio were already under way. So, in the delightful encounter imagined by Terry Johnson's play (performed at the Royal Court in 1982), Marilyn flees from the gawping spectators and lowbrow frustrations of filming the subway grating scene for *The Seven Year Itch* to drop in unannounced on a shyly startled Einstein in the hope of intellectual stimulation ('Gee,' she sighs contentedly after being lectured sternly on the dangers of merely pretending to under-

stand, 'this is the best conversation I ever had'). But just as a despairingly jealous DiMaggio is on Marilyn's trail, so McCarthy is hounding Einstein to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee; and in a valiant attempt to rescue the manuscript of Einstein's latest opus from being impounded as subversive, Marilyn gets punched in the stomach by McCarthy, causing her to abort the baby that might have saved her marriage. Significant events that are insignificant, in that physically Marilyn could never have borne the child anyway, while Einstein himself cheerfully throws away the manuscript he has already destroyed four times. Relativity. At the end, absently watching Marilyn go through her lines for him—only she hasn't any—Einstein sees a nuclear holocaust—only there isn't one.

Faithfully filming this scenario adapted by Johnson himself, Roeg has completely transformed it by placing it under his familiar sign of time and the stars. The opening image, of a wrist-watch spiralling in free-fall through space, has many ramifications: in its formal use as a device providing each of the four principals with childhood memories defining both the drives that turned them into stars and the inhibitions that burned them out; or in the more general symbolism of the timepiece stopped forever when a childhood experiment of Einstein's went wrong and which, for 'the Daddy of the H Bomb', signifies the guilty past horror of Nagasaki and the guilty future horror of what he has glimpsed next in his exploration of the precise nature of the

universe. More particularly, though, time hovers over the film in its apprehension of the mid-50s as a time of apprehension. Marilyn glitters as a bright star in the firmament, yet already one can glimpse the suicide that lies ahead through DiMaggio (over the hill as a baseball player and gloomily facing the ruin of his life), McCarthy (darkly contemplating the dying gasp of his witch-hunts) and Einstein (looking back on his achievement, two years before his death, with anguished apology). This time of Cold War darkness was perhaps finally understood—in the sense Einstein distinguishes from knowledge when he says, 'Knowledge is not truth, it is merely agreement'—during the protest years of the 60s. But what came of that understanding-cum-protest? Relativity again.

The stars hover over the film as resonantly as time, starting of course with the fact that each of the protagonists is a luminary in his or her chosen field. Then, too, there are the stars in the sky (which make Marilyn feel 'small and lonely and sad'), noted by the technician setting up the wind-machine under the grating for the *Seven Year Itch* scene when asked by his lascivious colleague, before the skirt-blowing has even started, what he sees: 'I see the stars,' he says wonderingly. 'You look at the stars and you feel like tomorrow you can do anything.' 'Philosophical bastard!' snarls the disappointed lecher, reducing those stars to jocular alignment to the various references to God (from the first technician's awed 'I saw the face of God!' when the skirt starts flying, to Marilyn's explanation of her ballplayer husband, 'He's God!' as he jealously tries to batter his way into Einstein's hotel room). Yet these references, taken together, do combine into a caveat against placing too much faith in the infallibility of human stars, who may profess to attain physical perfection or pure seduction (DiMaggio, Marilyn), to create a more perfect world or a more perfect understanding of it (McCarthy, Einstein), but who are nevertheless driven to measure their limitations against some probably non-existent God of their own.

The astral stars, meanwhile, are an unseen presence watching over this microcosm in which the four protagonists—less individuals, by virtue of their stardom, than endless reflections of humanity as they might be refracted by a mirror-maze—struggle to come to terms with their essential smallness and solitude. It is almost as though some aloof Olympian were making sport of human history—and delightfully funny much of it is, what with Einstein countering DiMaggio's boast of having featured in thirteen bubblegum-card series with his shy assertion that 'I was in Chewy Fruit's Great Scientific Achievements'—only to become sud-

denly touched by an awareness of the fragile vulnerability of these luminaries of human endeavour.

Confined to a terrestrial hive of narrowly connecting cells—barroom, hotel room, street corner with subway grating—these creatures scurry in a heartrendingly busy activity that resumes the history of human relationships as DiMaggio and Marilyn slug out a marital *huis clos* in which love is the loser, Einstein is too late vouchsafed a glimpse of paradise, and McCarthy burrows hopelessly on the fringes, locked out by the puritan intransigence that condemns him to remain a loner. An earthbound activity, switching from the horizontal to the vertical only once, when Einstein is carried up—though only to his floor in the hotel—by an enigmatic Cherokee elevator operator (Will Sampson) who himself continues upwards, emerges on the roof, and

addresses the Manhattan skyline over which wolves chillingly howl with some ancestral tribal chant.

'I know you. You're a Cherokee,' the elevator man had told Einstein, in a double-edged reference to the Cherokee belief that wherever he is, there is the centre of the world, and to DiMaggio's observation that if Columbus hadn't discovered America 'we'd all be Indians'. *Faux-naïf* like much else in the film (the disembodied voice chanting 'America 'tis of thee...' along with the howling wolves on the rooftop; the tuppence coloured images of cherry blossom time in Japan before Nagasaki), the thread of significance (or insignificance) here is wholly serious and has less to do with getting back to ancient wisdoms than with Einstein's complaint that people, though seeing themselves at the centre of the universe, 'won't take responsibility for their world, they want to put it

on the shoulders of the few.' The point is that, revered as the world's greatest repository of knowledge, Einstein knows that knowing is nothing: 'If I say I know, I stop thinking, but so long as I think, I come to understand, I might approach some truth.' And going on thinking, keeping his thoughts to himself, Einstein *has* approached that truth: the bleak paradox revealed in his final moments with Marilyn as she tries to reassure him that he is not responsible for what happened at Nagasaki. 'There's something worse,' he mutters: 'What could be worse?': 'I don't know...' and I must not think about it'—that *understanding* means that man must stop thinking. Another rogue Roeg like *Eureka*, and as likely to be subjected to critical crassness, *Insignificance* makes all the British cinema's much-vaunted Oscar winners pale into... well, insignificance. □

Slide!

The Purple Rose of Cairo/Terrence Rafferty

Woody Allen makes jokes about God the way other comedians make jokes about their wives. In his new movie, God is either Fred Astaire, whose voice—singing 'Heaven, I'm in Heaven,' the opening line of 'Cheek to Cheek'—is both the first and the last voice we hear, or the unseen pair of hack writers who concocted a movie called *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the sort of 30s comedy in which Broadway sophisticates mix *very* dry martinis before rushing out to catch the floor show at the Copa and the innocent hero, Tom Baxter, exclaims, 'To think that only yesterday I was in an Egyptian tomb and now here I am on the verge of a madcap Manhattan weekend!'

This glittering black and white world—within the full-colour world of the Woody Allen movie called *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Rank)—is Allen's sweetest and funniest version of the afterlife, his greatest God joke ever, because it's really awfully silly, full of spirits so blithe they verge on idiocy, and the creator's grip isn't quite as firm as it seems to be: one of these debonair beings, the gallant, open-faced archaeologist chap from the Egyptian tomb, steps right off the screen in a New Jersey movie house and carries off a young woman from the audience. He's an angel escaped from the choir, a virgin sprung.

This impossible event throws the Depression-era Jersey town into an uproar, as planeloads of Hollywood types, including the alarmed producer Raoul Hirsch, descend on the little theatre—and transports the lucky woman from the audience, a timid, dreamy housewife named Cecilia, into a state of blissful romantic confusion. It's a more familiar sort of miracle to us, and to Woody Allen: no stranger than the

magic-lantern apparitions of *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, the infinite transformations of Leonard Zelig, or the magical bedroom farce of 'The Kugel-mass Episode,' whose unfortunate hero shuttles back and forth between his dreary life in New York and a passionate affair with Emma Bovary, and winds up trapped in a book called *Remedial Spanish*. In *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (both Allen's film and Raoul Hirsch's), people just materialise—here one minute, there the next, and everything in between has been edited out.

To think: Tom Baxter was in this swanky apartment just a blink of the eye ago, and now he's at the Copacabana;

Cecilia, kissing Tom in an abandoned amusement park, was at home with her brutish husband the last time we looked; the actor who 'created' Tom, Gil Shepherd, last seen at a Hollywood party, is suddenly bumping into Cecilia in New Jersey. In the world of a movie, where we never have to see the distance travelled from one place to another, the impulsive leap from the screen into the audience almost makes sense, and it's easy to see why the editing of a conventional Hollywood picture would, to a lifelong New Yorker like Woody Allen, seem an attribute of heaven: imagine getting where you want to go without having to search for a cab, stew in midtown traffic or expose yourself to the rigours of the subway. The big-screen miracle is a pair of lovers having a madcap Manhattan weekend without budging, locked in an embrace in the



The Purple Rose of Cairo.

centre of the frame as a bright-lights montage—El Morocco, the 21 Club—whirls by behind them.

The magic-carpet style of film-making, with scene after scene of characters who seem to have dropped into place right out of the sky, isn't wholly new to Woody Allen. He's always been fond of jumping from one spot to another, from his first movies, which were constructed in chunks of autonomous shtick, archipelagoes of skits, to later and more unified arrangements of bits, like *Annie Hall* and *Zelig*; his restlessness is less arbitrary, more artful now, but he's still reluctant to show the connecting material, the hard travelling of narrative—the progress of the characters from one comic or dramatic moment to the next.

One of the reasons why Allen's last movie, *Broadway Danny Rose*, goes a little flat from time to time is that it's mostly about a journey, a car trip from New Jersey to Manhattan, and the story has a tendency to stall. It's a road movie made by a man who isn't really interested in how things move. (And the people in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, living through the Depression in a town whose plant has closed, gamble and hustle and fantasise in movie houses because they can't believe in progress, either.) What is new about *Purple Rose* is the effortless way it glides over the gaps, a combination of airiness and intricacy so graceful that we barely notice the steps and little jumps, but see only a smooth dance routine—and all achieved within the frame of the story, without the benefit of the kinds of intervention which have served Woody Allen so well in the past: the voice-over monologue, the mock-documentary narration, even his own presence as an actor.

Here, Woody Allen speaks through his story and through his actors, and the acting is inspired. The cast of the movie within the movie, which includes John Wood, Edward Herrmann, Deborah Rush, Zoe Caldwell and Van Johnson, are an hilarious formal dress ensemble, lounging and complaining in their penthouse set as they wait for Tom Baxter to return from his foray into the outside world, all of them vapid and cheerful and dazed, as if the thin air up there on screen had made them light-headed. Jeff Daniels, looking a little goofy under Tom Baxter's pith helmet but wholesomely dashing in Gil Shepherd's Hollywood threads, gives a finely shaded and very funny performance, shuttling easily between the perfect innocence of the movie hero and the more calculated boyishness of the career-wise young actor (who's hoping to play a real hero, Charles Lindbergh, and become a star). And Mia Farrow's Cecilia is a wonderful creation, a woman who always seems to be looking up—at her looming husband, at the tall, noble frame of Tom or Gil, and, constantly, at the huge figures on the screen. As

Farrow plays her, Cecilia is enraptured and distracted (she's always dropping plates full of food), but her vivid imagination is a kind of survival skill: her life makes no sense, and her immersion in the blunt, madcap clarity of the movies gives her a peculiar strength.

Everything in this movie makes heavenly sense. Woody doesn't have to materialise on screen to pull everything

together—he remains above it all, pulling lines and characters and situations out of thin air and dropping them back to earth with flawless aim. In *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the creator's absence is the subtlest, slyest joke of all: we're forced to imagine Woody Allen, and the picture we get is a small man in top hat, white tie, and glasses, who moves, like Fred Astaire, in mysterious ways. □

Forty years on *A Love in Germany*/Jill Forbes

In what is today the Baden-Württemberg region of Southern Germany, in the sleepy village of Brombach where the Bürgermeister spent his days supping beer and the mail was delivered by a fat lady with blond plaits, the shopkeeper's wife Paulina seduced a Polish prisoner of war while her husband was away defending the territories of the Third Reich. Paulina had a son who is first seen sitting on the shop counter sucking a giant lollipop with a black swastika imprinted on it. Perhaps this is an emblem of the goodies promised to a childlike population by Hitler's regime. But if Herbert is lacking the percipience which characterises Oskar in *The Tin Drum*, he similarly witnesses his mother embracing a stranger and is sufficiently affected by the events which ensue to take his own son back to Brombach, forty years on, in an attempt to understand what took place.

Rolf Hochhuth, the author of the novel on which *A Love in Germany* (Artificial Eye) is based, has a reputation for seeking out fascist complicities, and here the target is, among others, the Swiss government, which made a practice of sending escaped Polish POWs straight back to Germany. This is a true story, meticulously researched and,

under Wajda's direction, astonishing in the authenticity of its detail. So true is it, indeed, that it reveals more about the tenor of village life than any fiction could, for in Brombach no one acts from high-principled sympathy with the regime, and motivation has less to do with place and time than with a conventional case of rivalry among women.

Herbert starts out with the slightly naive belief that he can discover who denounced his mother. Elsbeth her book-keeper, whose fiancé is killed at the front before ever she lost her virginity, finds Paulina's ostentatious flirtation offensive and cruel, so it could have been her. But it could equally have been Maria next door who covets (and eventually acquires) Paulina's shop and who is envious of her neighbour's son, husband, and the amount of money she is reputedly making. And it could have been the Melchior on whom Stani the Pole is billeted, or the chemist from whom Paulina buys condoms, or any of the people who were in the chemist's shop at the time, or any of her own customers who have seen Stani in the shop. The point is that Paulina refuses to hide her infatuation from the village and refuses to be contrite. She throws caution to the winds by visiting the injured Stani in



A Love in Germany: (left) Piotr Lysak (Stani).

hospital and refuses to plead that she was raped when she is finally apprehended. Her friends and neighbours feel cheated in the face of such an unnatural unwillingness to be let off the hook and, as Herbert reluctantly comes to realise, morally speaking they are all guilty.

After Paulina is arrested there occurs a significant shift of location and tone. The village is left behind and we enter the arcane world of organised racism, regulated by a rule-book so byzantine that special medical experts are required to interpret it. The ss officer in charge of the case has taken a shine to Paulina and, since she claims full responsibility, dreams up a wheeze for, as it were, retrospective legitimisation by declaring Stani a candidate for Germanisation. Clearly, just any Pole won't do: postulants must be checked for height, weight, skin colour, hair colour, etc, against a complicated system of gradings designed to dispel all ambiguities and provide for all eventualities. Stani's skull is measured with a contraption that looks like a scold's cap, his eyes are matched against a sheet of glass marbles each a slightly different shade of blue and classified from 'A' to 'J'. The entire operation recalls medieval tests for sorcery and we would hardly have been surprised if he had been dunked in the village pond and left to sink or swim. Yet the soldiers performing this grotesque verification take it only half seriously, while the doctor mobilised to sign the papers rejects the whole business as nonsense. Thus we are only returned from the realms of light relief by Stani loudly protesting that he is a Pole and intends to remain one.

With this he has signed his own death warrant and black tragedy replaces black comedy as the gallows looms. Another Pole is found to hang his compatriot and extensively briefed in the macabre art of placing the noose correctly round the condemned man's

neck. A lorryload of Polish prisoners accompanies the execution squad back to Brombach where, in the quarry where he and Paulina first made love, they witness *pour l'exemple* Stani's slow agony. Paulina is hounded out of town with a scarlet letter round her neck and Herbert is taken into care. So ends a squalid little chapter of German history.

Andrzej Wajda is possibly the most celebrated member of the Polish diaspora next to the Pope and his films have kept modern Polish history in the forefront of our minds for the last 25 years. This is why a particular interest has surrounded the trilogy he is due to make abroad, with the help of the French Ministry of Culture. His sense of timing is impeccable: *Danton*, that meditation on the course of the Revolution, opened at the height of Solidarity's activities; now *A Love in Germany* coincides with the fortieth anniversary of VE Day. And yet, the films Wajda has made abroad paradoxically have a less universal import than the apparently more parochial *A Generation*, *Kanal* or *Man of Marble*. Without in any way wishing to deny that the Nazi treatment of the Poles was abominable, *A Love in Germany* is very much a reminder that Germany has a 'Polish Question' much as Britain has an 'Irish Question'. The fact that Wajda is playing away from home may explain, therefore, an unevenness which is otherwise difficult to account for.

The first part of this film does for provincial Germany what Chabrol has done for provincial France—the rhythm of village life, with its gossip and petty jealousies but also its affection and solidarity, is brilliantly observed. It is quite clear that Nazi regulations are more honoured in the breach than in the observance and that most of the inhabitants are carrying on as normal. The drama turns on the contrasting performances of Hanna Schygulla and

Marie-Christine Barrault who, as Paulina's lascivious neighbour, steals the show and confirms that she is one of the great underrated actresses of this generation. The second part begins as a German version of *Dad's Army*, which is an original not to say refreshing approach to the ss, but these essentially comic, or at least lighthearted, scenes sit uneasily with the gruesome and sadistic execution and the adult Herbert's persistent failure to get answers to his questions.

There may be no reason why *a priori* we should expect films about Germany at war to be meditations on the nature of fascism and to embody the desperation we know it caused. Yet somehow that is what the best ones are, and though *A Love in Germany* may well be about 'ordinary' fascism it fails to measure up to the competition of *Germany, Pale Mother* and others of that kind. On the other hand, the portrayal of day to day life is so successful that it somewhat diminishes the Polish dimension, which is unfortunate since part of Poland's problem is that it has always been the subplot rather than the plot. As it becomes increasingly difficult to say who won the war, it is at least obvious that the Poles lost it, but Wajda, who has performed so well in the propaganda war which ensued, is in danger of surrender in *A Love in Germany*. Poles go home? □

Among the Amish

Witness/Nick Roddick

When you get down to it, all Peter Weir's films have been horror movies in disguise. Like the Harkers (Jonathan and Mina), Weir's heroes have been simultaneously mesmerised and repelled by their various Draculas. Arthur Waldo (Terry Camillieri) sucked into the orbit of Paris and its cars, the schoolgirls drawn inexorably on to and into Hanging Rock, David Burton (Richard Chamberlain) discovering the 'dream time' of *The Last Wave*, even the graduated Australian innocents of *Gallipoli* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* meeting their respective overseas nemeses—all have been more or less willing victims of a world fascinatingly at odds with their own.

With *Witness* (UIP), Weir changes genre—the film is a thriller—and tells a tale in whose genesis he had little part: it reached him third hand, via producer Edward Feldman and star Harrison Ford, the latter exercising his by now well established prerogative to choose his own director. And yet, the same sense of a hero torn between two worlds is central to the film. The difference here is that the hero, John Book (Ford), a



Witness: Succoured by the Amish.

Philadelphia detective, starts out in hell and finds himself, provisionally, in paradise—the strict, repressive but oh-so-solid world of the Pennsylvania Amish.

Called in to investigate the slaying of a fellow cop, Book discovers that the only witness to the crime is an Amish boy, Samuel Lapp (Lukas Haas). When Samuel casually identifies another cop as the killer, the boy, his mother Rachel (Kelly McGillis), and Book himself become the targets of a cover-up campaign. Wounded, Book flees to the Amish community of Lancaster County, to which he has already returned mother and child, and is himself slightly improbably taken in, healed and, having been dressed as an Amish, allowed to stay.

A relationship develops between Book and Rachel, which hovers on the brink of sensuality. But it is a plunge which Book finally rejects. 'If we'd made love last night,' he tells Rachel, 'I'd have had to stay, or you'd have had to leave.' It is a turning point for Book: his new sensitivity to the values of the Amish makes him aware that he does not belong.

It is this clarity of motivation and simplicity of theme that makes *Witness* Weir's tightest film to date. There is none of that flamboyantly woolly flirting with cultural antipathies and personal-versus-political revolution that made *The Year of Living Dangerously* so compulsive and so maddening. And there are none of those oneiric touches (the sudden hysteria that greets Irma when she returns to the school in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; the water that floods down the stairs in *The Last Wave*) which turn out to be just touches—hints of a deeper meaning which Weir cannot or will not pursue.

This tendency in his films, often noted, to suggest rather than deliver has led to them being dismissed as mood pieces—the work of a talented director who just cannot tell stories. To be sure, *Witness* is strong on mood, largely thanks to John Seale's brave and intelligent cinematography, which is as little daunted by excess of darkness as by excess of light. But to use it to prove that Weir cannot tell a story is manifestly absurd. Take the scene in which Samuel discovers the identity of the killer. Left to his own devices in the Philadelphia squad room, the boy is first caught in the ebb and flow of police activity. Then, in one of the continuous takes which are the film's most striking trademarks, he begins to explore, ending up in front of a glass trophy case in which, after a casual exploration of the contents, he suddenly spots a photo of the killer. The fluency with which he passes from onlooker to witness, and from innocence to involvement, is handled with a skill that is nothing if not narrative.

The film's real fascination, though, comes from the ambiguous position in which it places Book and, by extension,



The witness.

us. Like other Weir films, it draws us in to the point of disorientation. Shortly after a telephone call has informed him that his partner has been murdered, Book finds himself caught in a confrontation between a group of Amish and a party of taunting rednecks. He observes the humiliation of Daniel (Alexander Godunov) and, like us, waits for Daniel to respond. Daniel, of course, does not. But Book does, giving in to his (and our) frustration, meeting violence with violence. The action, as he knew it must, fatally distances him from the Amish. Not just ideologically, either: by making him conspicuous, the incident leads directly to his being tracked down by his pursuers, and thus triggers off a far greater outburst of violence, which sets Book further at odds with both

himself and the Amish. Paradise is lost, as it always will be, through its inevitable incompatibility with the 'real' world.

Witness is a more than competent, watchable, even inspired film—one of those quintessentially American movies in which story, theme and visual style coalesce; a film rich in both skill and suggestion. If anything, though, one misses those rough moments which in *Gallipoli* and *The Year of Living Dangerously*—his bravest and worst films—showed Weir reaching, perhaps overreaching, for something more.

At the same time, it is worth reflecting on why, in a period dominated by films of pubescent passage or self-fulfilment through dancing, it should have been *Witness* that has taken the prize at the American box office, in a way in which Weir's other films, not to mention the more obviously meaningful rural dramas like *Country*, *The River* and *Places in the Heart*, have not. For that, after all, is what *Witness* is 'about'—the values of the city and the late twentieth century (to which we all, of necessity, subscribe) being thrown into doubt and rendered hollow by contact with an older, stricter, more confident order—a horror movie in reverse, in other words.

The film allows us, in the company of Book, to take a sort of holiday from our normal concerns, to visit other values *en touriste*, drawing the strengths from a strange and alien tradition without really immersing ourselves in it. It is a vicarious visit—time spent down among the Amish—until, like Book, we return, reluctantly but inevitably, to the ordinary world of cars and phones, guns and earthly retribution. Thus *Witness*, in addition to dramatising our own responses, above all the temptation to meet violence with a juster and more effective mirror of itself, also parallels the experience we have in watching it: for Book a few weeks, for us two hours, in another world. □

The candidate in camera

Winter Kills/Richard Combs

'I am thinking about how we took the first primaries. Believe me, politics in a state like that involves a lot of money, and I mean under-the-bridge, over-the-table, and tucked-in-a-box-of-cigars money . . . And we had the most gorgeous TV commercial you ever saw of Tim leading these three tanks across that Hilda Hess sector in Germany to liberate that beleaguered infantry column . . . We made a real noise in that shitty little state, kid. We got fifty-three real movie stars to turn out and roam up and down the state yelling Tim's name.' Thus the making of a president, according to Thomas Xavier Kegan, father and

stage manager of Tim Kegan, President of the United States until, in Philadelphia, on George Washington's birthday in 1960, an assassin's bullet renders him 'gloriously dead at forty-two'. That assassin, declared by a public commission to have been working alone, is himself shot down before he can stand trial, and many other people, connected in whatever remote way with the assassination, will subsequently die in mysterious circumstances, etc, etc.

That key speech by Pa Kegan, reminiscing to his younger son Nick, who has just discovered that there was a second rifle (and behind it a conspiracy of

ever-expanding proportions) in Philadelphia, has been adapted from Richard Condon's novel for William Richert's film of *Winter Kills* (ICA Projects). Through it, one can read not only a lot about the subject but about how Condon's conspiracy-theory-cum-fantasy becomes a show-business fact of life in the film. It is, first of all, a funny version of how the Kennedy Camelot was invented and sold—the glamour, the military career, the political clout. But Condon's *Winter Kills* is not exactly a *roman à clef*, it's not really trying to comprehend the Kennedy dynasty by fictional analogy, it's not really 'about' the Kennedys any more than it is about the Keganans. It's an elaborate, even phantasmagoric charade, but one with curiously little emotional effect. One can surmise that Joe Kennedy, like Pa Kegan, might have bought his son the presidency and then had him shot when he misused it, but that's not the truth Condon is after. The fantasy is rather literal in effect, the Kennedy connections both shocking and uninteresting, because they're the scaffolding for something else.

Winter Kills is a book of wild, antic exasperation, a tirade against American capitalist democracy, with speeches put in the mouths of many characters to sum up the feeling that everything is manipulation, that wealth and power conspire to produce a fantasy which everyone else lives. It comes as no surprise to learn that Pa Kegan is the arch manipulator behind all the plots and phantoms of plots which Nick chases down in order to find out how his brother was killed. Nor is it a surprise that there is a power behind *that* throne, Pa's intelligence gatherer and electronics wizard, Professor Cerutti. The point, in the end, is the theory behind Cerutti, which he explains in a last speech: 'In business, as in all other life situations, people tend to accept the plausible if it is wondrously documented . . . We pioneered these methods in modern society, until today, as we see, our politicians and political structure could not survive without them. Life and truth have been turned into diverting, gripping, convincing scenarios.'

Richert certainly plays fair—even if he has to prune and compress somewhat—by all the scenarios that crop up in Condon's plot. Tim Kegan was killed by a Texas oil magnate; he was killed by the Philadelphia police; by the Mafia; by the Tubesters' union; by the head of a Hollywood studio. What Richert has done supremely well, however, is to realise the novel's sense that all conspiracies are possible when fantasy is the name of the game. This *Winter Kills* plays its own kind of literal charade, turning Condon's growling political disgust into a casting coup. The film doesn't have 'fifty-three real movie stars', but it does have a fair number, and they're used in such a way that



Winter Kills: John Huston (Pa Kegan).

there is even less possibility of surprise in the plot, but an enhanced fictional aura (it's a vindication of the cameo role or, as Cerutti puts it, 'the techniques of fiction playing like searchlights upon a fancied facade of truth'). Who could doubt Pa Kegan's ultimate guilt from John Huston's first appearance in the role (even if the memory of *Chinatown* has been dimmed by the delays in getting *Winter Kills* to the screen)? Or Cerutti's sinister, possibly psychopathic motives from Anthony Perkins' nervous expostulations? Or a whole dimension of life as brassy performance from Elizabeth Taylor's few, wordless seconds on screen as entertainer *extraordinaire*, procuress and Mafia henchwoman, Lola Camonte?

Fate, even, has entered the conspiracy here, giving the literal-fantasy quality of the story a real-life ring. *Winter Kills* went into production in December 1976, as Richert's directorial debut, budgeted at six million dollars. Early in 1977, money mysteriously ran out, the production closed down, and Richert spent the next two years showing around a rough cut that was ten minutes short to try to revive the project. It was somehow reassembled (under-the-bridge, over-the-table?) in December 1978 and completed, only to disappear again before its general release. Blood as well as celluloid has been spilled: one of the film's executive producers has been shot dead, and the other convicted of drug dealing and sentenced to forty years.

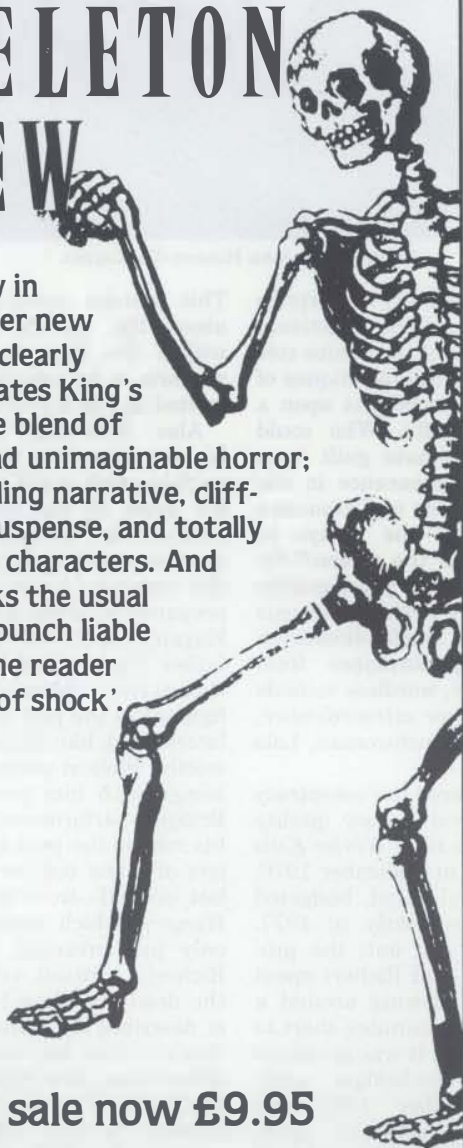
This history doesn't 'prove' anything about the specific conspiracy theory within the film, but it is a curious scenario in its own right to add to those trotted out by Cerutti.

Also following Condon in style, Richert gives the film a hard, bright surface—this is not a seductive fantasy, it's more of the sarcastic, take-it-or-leave-it kind. In one respect, however, he has deepened it, by withdrawing even the security props which Condon is prepared to allow his hero. Here Nick Kegan's girlfriend and his substitute father figure Keifetz (Richard Boone) themselves become either another figment in the plot or one of its manipulators. And, like the aura of the untrustworthy biblical patriarch which Huston brings with him from *Chinatown*, Jeff Bridges' performance as Nick takes up his role as the poor little rich boy—with lots of plans but no purpose, character but no self—from Bob Rafelson's *Stay Hungry* (which would, originally, have only just preceded *Winter Kills*). But Richert's wittiest contribution may be the dead president himself. Tim Kegan is described by Condon (with a boyish shock of hair and a toothy smile, more Bobby than Jack Kennedy); in the film's flashbacks, Tim is never seen and people talking to him simply address the camera. In this scenario, the most curious of all, a character who is dead before the film begins is brought back to life by identifying him with the audience. □

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the British Government
1927-84**

**by Margaret Dickinson
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To write a readable history of the relations, over more than half a century, between the various sections of the film community and successive British governments must have been a daunting prospect. But the authors of this solid piece of research have risen bravely to the challenge. Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street (assisted and encouraged, as they acknowledge, by Simon Hartog) have successfully produced a digestible account of a singularly indigestible subject. They deserve the gratitude and congratulations of all those directly or indirectly involved or interested in the chequered development of what is loosely referred to as the British film industry.

Although the book seeks to confine itself to the relations between cinema and state, inevitably the authors stray outside these limits and provide us with a useful summary of the industry's own problems over the period in question. They demonstrate in detail how government intervention came about through, first, the threat of domination by the major US companies, continuous in different forms since the end of the First World War to the present day, and, second, the trends towards monopoly within the British film industry itself.

Reference is made to the Cinematograph Films Act of 1909 which was designed to protect audiences from fire hazards (which illogically led to censorship on the part of local authorities and the setting up in 1912 of the British Board of Film Censors) and to the duties on film imports introduced in 1915. Government protection really began, however, with the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927, and the events leading up to its enactment are faithfully described in the context of a political climate in which protectionism was a sensitive issue. The Act imposed a renter's quota and an exhibitor's quota, the former being abandoned in later years. A full account is given as to how successive governments continued the protective quota legislation, persuaded the industry to accept the Eady Levy (which was

subsequently enforced by Statute) and established and maintained the National Film Finance Corporation.

The authors also chronicle the succession of Reports commissioned by government and the regrettable fact that their most imaginative and constructive recommendations were generally thwarted by a mixture of vested trade interest and Civil Service caution. Thus the Moyne Committee recommended in 1936 the setting up of an impartial Films Commission to regulate the affairs of the industry—so often plagued by internal disagreements—but this was rejected by the Board of Trade on the ground that 'it would place executive powers in the hands of a body over whom the President would have little control but for whose actions he would be answerable in Parliament.'

Forty years later another committee—the Prime Minister's Working Party—made a similar suggestion, namely the establishment of a British Film Authority, but this too came to nothing following a change of government. The authors report that the earlier rejection was lamented by John Grierson in the following terms: 'The long-term service of creative and national interests is being sacrificed to short-term financial ones. The Moyne proposals took a long view and aimed at a wise government of the film industry... but the loss of the Films Commission must disappoint all who wish to see the anarchies of the trade abated, the interests of minorities preserved, the quality and personnel factors encouraged, and the fierce commercial interests of the trade geared to national purposes.'

The Board of Trade nevertheless urged the industry to establish its own central organisation and in March 1937, at the CEA's annual dinner, Dr Leslie Burgin, the then Films Minister, pleaded for 'the trade to set up some body which can serve as a focusing point for matters affecting the trade as a whole and which can deal with some of the problems which arise between the various sections.'

It is also interesting to note that the Moyne Committee referred to the need for a Films Bank, but this idea was not translated into fact for more than a decade when Mr Harold Wilson (as he then was), who by common consent has done more for the industry than any other politician, was President of the Board of Trade.

The authors deal effectively with the influence of the Second World War on British film production, including the development of the British documentary film movement; the imposition of the celebrated 75 per cent *ad*

BOOK REVIEWS

valorem duty on imported US films in 1947 and the resulting embargo on the export to Britain of US films; the extraordinary strength of diplomatic pressure exercised in support of the Motion Picture Association of America; and the Anglo-American Film Agreement of 1948.

Some of the most interesting passages in the book derive from official documents now made available by the Public Record Office under the 30-year rule. These recount revealing exchanges between Ministers and their officials and could provide material for further instalments of *Yes, Minister*. It is perhaps partly because documents from this source are not yet available in respect of more recent years that the final 30 years of the story are telescoped into a mere 22 pages of this 248-page book and, though the work of compression has been done with skill, it still looks like a coda to the remainder. This period was perhaps less dramatic than what had gone before but, with the growth of television and, more recently, the new technological developments, it was a time of great change. Perhaps in a later edition, when the dust of current re-arrangements has settled, the authors will expand this section. At the same time they might refer to the Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry (now to be called the British Screen Advisory Council) dealing with Technological Developments, Film and Television Co-operation, and Distribution respectively.

In summing up the benefits of state support in the final paragraph of the book the authors make an odd statement when they say, 'Even the modest funds available to the NFFC and the BFI Production Board have enabled a few films to be made which would probably never have been scripted if the initiative had been left entirely with the dominant media groups.' Surely none of the many films financed by the Production Board would have seen the light of day without the BFI's support, and it is certainly to damn the NFFC with faint praise to refer to 'a few films' when it has made a vital financial contribution to 767 feature films and 183 shorts; to which should be added the observation that both the BFI and the NFFC have provided early opportunities for film-makers who are now in the front rank. However, the foregoing comments are minor criticisms only of an excellent piece of research which will be invaluable to professionals and students alike.

The book ends on a somewhat pessimistic note with the sub-

heading 'WHITE PAPER: BLACK FUTURE?' and the authors suggest that with the removal of all government support and protection, 'British film production may finally lose its protracted but tenacious struggle for survival.' But British film producers have already survived a multitude of crises and may well survive the one posed by privatisation. Indeed, the winds of the marketplace are not as cold as they once were and they may even prove invigorating to the new generation of talented and determined film-makers. Finally, whether or not the removal of government support proves as disastrous as the authors apprehend, I have a feeling that the Films Bill now before Parliament will not prove to be the final act between Cinema and State.

JOHN TERRY

Without blinkers

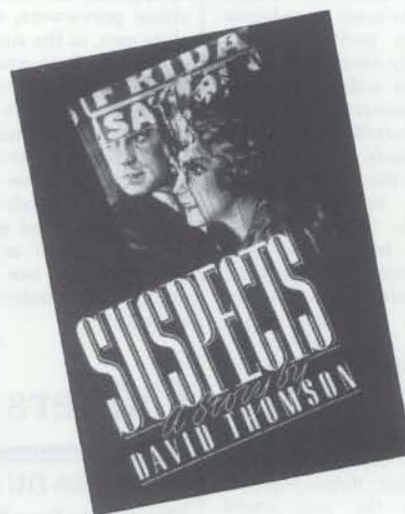
TELEVISION MYTHOLOGIES:

Stars, Shows and Signs
edited by Len Masterman
Comedia/MK Media Press
£3.95 (paper)

Bombarded with images, we have little time, or make too little effort, to unmask them. The myths we swallow refresh the parts the real world doesn't reach. And there is no greater perpetrator of our accumulated mythology than television, which lulls us to sleep with a view of the world more real than reality. Mind massage: 'the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying.' The phrase was coined some thirty years ago by Roland Barthes, in the preface to his book *Mythologies*, whose sharp little essays on such contemporary myths as plastic, striptease, Garbo's face, soap powders, steak and chips taught us to beware the pleasures of repetition.

Barthes wrote before television became mass culture, in the days when 'Omo euphoria' referred to the newpeak of street hoardings and cinema commercials rather than to expensively packaged slots between the small-screen soaps. So it is an excellent idea to apply the Barthes model to what is now our primary myth-maker, with a view to unmasking some of television's representations of what-goes-without-saying—its hiding of history. Len Masterman has edited an anthology of essays on some aspects of British television during the summer of 1984, both in homage to Barthes and as a collaborative attempt

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Casablanca or The Third Man
you must read this book



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* Extracts in *The Sunday Times*
and *Time Out*

Imagine that the sister of Laura Hunt from *Laura* is married to George Bailey of *It's a Wonderful Life*, that George and Mary Frances's children include Travis the *Taxi Driver*, Sally of *Atlantic City* and Harry of *Night Moves* and suppose that George has worried all his life about Noah Cross in *Chinatown*, about incest, and the chances of a long-lost child living somewhere, waiting to be found. Imagine that all the characters in *film noir* might be inhabitants of the same world . . . a world like life . . . all members of one shattered, paranoid family . . . suspect and suspicious.

Publication 28th May
£8.95

SUSPECTS

by

DAVID THOMSON

Secker &
Warburg

to show 'by whom, in whose interests, using what kind of rhetorical techniques, and producing what kind of consciousness' television makes its images and fashions its icons. A welcome enterprise, but perhaps inevitably a variously successful one.

The range is wide, from soap opera to commercials, Tommy Cooper to Torvill and Dean, though curiously confined to home produce (the single piece on an American import—a spoof debate on *The 'A' Team*—is a gate-crashing bore). The best essays are perceptive, revealing and to the point. John Corner observes how television tends to make sport into a celebratory spectacle, nowhere more evident than in the BBC's title sequence to its coverage of the Los Angeles Olympics, with its *Chariots of Fire* music, its slow motion and its sepia tinting displacing the athletes from the real world of competition into a mythical realm of national glory and superhuman achievement—a myth upset when Daley Thompson whistled his way through the National Anthem.

Ian Connell provides an eminently sensible corrective to the view, resiliently held across the political spectrum, that television and 'the media' can be blamed for corrupting their innocent consumers, as though their version of events did not connect with feelings and thoughts already in place. Kevin Robins and Frank Webster argue that *Tomorrow's World* trivialises science and technology with its rhetoric of magical expertise and its construction of science as ideologically neutral. Philip Simpson writes a sympathetic, evocative account of that odd little programme about sheepdog trials, *One Man and His Dog*, identifying the appeal to the urban viewer of its carefully ordered rural harmony.

Unlike some of the contributors here, Simpson admits the pleasure the programme gives him. He is aware and wary of its deceptive apparatus, its processing of a fictive world, but can't feel 'a Barthesian sense of outrage at another victory for conformist realism.' This reflective approach contrasts sharply with some dire rehearsals of the academic liturgy, prolix with jargon and italic injunctions. An excited discovery of moving statues and clips from old movies in some recent TV commercials leads to a proclamation of the intertextuality of cultural practices, which is news from nowhere. And the late and great Eric Morecambe would have been surprised to learn (as would Shakespeare) that his asides to the audience 'symbolically affirm subordinated class struggle'.

There is a puritanical—and I

think reactionary—streak running through some of these essays, promulgating as many myths as it claims to discern. (One piece, on Fleet Street's television previewers, makes myths of its own, in the simple matter of getting its facts wrong.) Happily, this is a minority voice, and most of the contributors to this book watch without blinkers. *Pace* Len Masterman's introduction, the Leavisite tradition of a cultural hierarchy is surely moribund, if not already dead and buried. If television gives us both *Dallas* and Donizetti, can we not, with our eyes open, enjoy the pleasures of both?

DAVID WILSON

Cahiers

CAHIERS DU CINEMA

The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave

edited by Jim Hillier

Routledge & Kegan Paul
BFI/£16.95

My first reaction on leafing through this anthology was: too little and too late. This is perhaps unfair because the material the editor, Jim Hillier, has selected is still both relevant and important to the history of film criticism and, indeed, to film itself. But *Cahiers* did its job all too well: it has won most of its battles. In 1953, for Rivette to entitle an article 'The Genius of Howard Hawks' was provocative and, to many, close to insanity. To prefer Hitchcock's American films, to think that Nicholas Ray was an important director, to admire the Rossellini films with Ingrid Bergman (*Journey to Italy*, *Europa 51* and *Fear*): all these opinions were outrageous to most non-French critics.

Now they are common currency from Dubuque to Durham. This is no reason not to translate them into English, it is only a shame that this could not have been done twenty years ago when it might have hastened the rethinking of Anglo-Saxon critical attitudes. Who is not an auteurist, in some sense of the word, now? Who does not accept the existence of the 'genre' film? Who is there left who does not agree that a film can transcend its ostensible subject matter, that *mise en scène* is more important than the script?

Given that these tenets are the subject matter of this volume, is there any point in reading these pieces now? Yes, I think there is. Even if most readers are already in agreement, it is valuable to see how the *Cahiers* writers imposed their views on the world, for there is no doubt that they did,

directly or indirectly. If so many of these critics had not themselves gone on to make great films, they might have been paid less attention. That gave them more authority. But re-reading these articles, one sees that—give or take one or two lunacies—they are well-argued and persuasive statements of an aesthetic, a very French aesthetic (which, in twentieth century terms, means one influenced by American literature and pop culture). If the polemics are passé, the pieces are not.

So, not too late. Too little? Yes, in a sense, even though Jim Hillier has as many pages to cover ten years of *Les Cahiers* as David Wilson had for his *SIGHT AND SOUND* anthology which covered not ten, but fifty years in the life of a magazine. The problem lies elsewhere, and it is expressed by Hillier in his preface: 'When this anthology of selections from *Cahiers du Cinéma* was first discussed, it was planned that each volume should be self-contained and coherent within its own terms, should be representative of the period covered (in this case, some nine years and over a hundred issues of the magazine), should contain largely newly translated material rather than material already easily available in English, should be relevant and useful within contemporary film culture and film education, and should be pleasurable and accessible.'

'It was planned': the passive voice always rouses suspicion. Who, in fact, did the planning? Hillier, the British Film Institute, or Routledge & Kegan Paul who have co-published the work, the first of four volumes? It certainly doesn't seem to have been Hillier himself, because this first paragraph is immediately followed by an honest and candid second one: 'I hope that this somewhat tall order has been filled to a large extent, but some of the requirements have worked against each other. If, for example, work by André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut is not as fully represented in this volume as their importance to *Cahiers* would merit, this is because a great deal of their critical work is already available in English (and the same goes for work on Renoir, for example). At the same time, not to have represented Bazin, Godard and Truffaut by important writings would have been quite wrong. As a result, all three are represented here by some already available material and by some newly translated contributions. In any case, what would being "representative" of *Cahiers* mean? It could be taken to mean several rather different things: representative of con-

tributions by quality, or by importance—at the time or in retrospect—or representative of the magazine's broad range of concerns. The volume is, I think, generally representative in most of these ways, but I am conscious that, among other omissions, some *Cahiers* contributors, often with long and important associations with the magazine between 1951 and 1959, are poorly or not at all represented.'

Hillier's auto-critique says it all. There is scarcely anything left for a reviewer to complain about. (Yes, there is one exception—given the large number of articles on and by Ingmar Bergman in the *Cahiers* of the 50s, it is strange that Hillier has not reprinted a single one.) The only other thing to say is that he has taken on an impossible task, tried to fulfil too many requirements and, as he admits, these requirements have worked against each other.

On the other hand, half a loaf is better than none, always provided that the previously published works by Bazin, Godard and Truffaut are still readily available. In any case, the volume is a model of intelligent annotation. Many references needed explanation, and they are provided. The only mistake I found was that Hillier assumes that Robert Lachenay (one of Truffaut's many pen names) is a reference to the Marquis de la Chesnaye in *La Règle du Jeu*, whereas it is actually the name of his best boyhood friend, the model for René, Antoine Doinel's only friend in *Les quatre cents coups*.

RICHARD ROUD

Brief lives

SUSPECTS

by David Thomson

Secker and Warburg/£8.95

'People may raise their eyes, but they let the storyteller go on.' The sentence refers to bemused listeners to the contradictory radio reminiscences given by David Staebler, the Jack Nicholson character in *The King of Marvin Gardens*. We readers of *Suspects* likewise raise our eyes, faced with 85 imaginary biographical portraits of Hollywood film characters (mostly shaded *noir*), their lives extended backwards and forwards, tied together in cheeky knots and genealogies. And we, too, let the storyteller go on. For one thing, David Thomson writes his lives in a crisp, allusive style strewn with delectable phrases. For another, the book is no simple stunt, but an inevitable stepping-

BOOK REVIEWS

stone on the literary journey of an author and critic previously responsible for two novels, a pungent book on Hollywood's lure and lore (*America in the Dark*), a biography of Laurence Sterne (jester novelist *extraordinaire*), and a massively personal dictionary of film (accurately appraised by Gavin Lambert as 'a piece of movie literature that turns facts into romance').

Suspects, one could argue, takes the procedures of Thomson's *Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema* to their logical conclusion: the myths and images of the 'real' world now hold total sway, swallowing up the documentary evidence of individual films and careers and spawning facts of their own. Ilsa Lund, *Casablanca* heroine, died, so we hear, with Dag Hammarskjöld in his 1961 air crash, after a 'very close working relationship'. Francine Evans, from *New York, New York*, enjoyed a busy movie career in the 50s, including parts in Minnelli's 'adventurous failure' *A Virtuoso Personality* and Donen's *The Girl from Hot Coffee* (where she replaced Judy Garland). Waldo Lydecker, in his early days, was briefly employed reading aloud to the dying Henry James at Rye. As facts go, these seem as believable and resonant as many included in the *Biographical Dictionary*, where we read of Marie Dressler participating in a 1917 chorus-girl strike; of Webb Parmelee Hollenbeck (the proper name of Lydecker's screen impersonator); of Stella Stevens, a real-life girl from *Hot Coffee* (in Mississippi).

In part this is enjoyable parlour-game stuff, replete with details that require either good memories or good reference books for full appreciation. But Thomson's ambitions stretch further: he is documenting a specific, unified world, populated by *femmes fatales*, robber barons, guilt-ridden cowards, rapists, murderers, dark shadows, and countless family skeletons. Noah Cross (played by John Huston in *Chinatown*) crops up everywhere—a symbol of irrepressible greed, who enjoyed close working relationships down the decades with everyone from Norma Desmond to the Kathleen Turner character in *Body Heat* (they met at his 100th birthday party). But the chief linking threads in these meshed, scrambled lives are the families spawned by the hero of *It's a Wonderful Life* and the titular character in *Laura*. George Bailey, revealed as the book's aged, troubled narrator, marries Laura's sister Mary and fathers a particularly astonishing brood, including Harry Moseby from *Night Moves*, Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver*, and Susan Sarandon's Sally from *Atlantic City, U.S.A.* (taught her

skills, it is implied, at a casino established by Susan Alexander Kane). All their lives are buckled by violence; most of them reject family ties (the surname conveniently included).

Here Thomson lands himself in trouble. The book's George Bailey may be a sadder, wiser bird than Capra's original (and a confirmed *film noir* addict to boot), but it is still hard to relate the bright, beady writing style to anyone other than the author. And despite all Thomson's efforts, the portraits refuse to build into the intended cumulative narrative: the concluding synthesis of characters' lives only seems a hollow display of cleverness. Better by far to dip into the pages, savouring the imaginative flights and the good jokes, and pondering an all-British equivalent. Old Mother Riley: copper's nark, and for years PC George Dixon's bit on the side; Barnes Wallis, tortured elder brother of Barbara Blandish, dragged into *The Case of the Bouncing Blonde* (Merton Park, 1956). Henry V and... No, it just doesn't work.

GEOFF BROWN

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PAM CULLEN is Regional Manager (Europe) for the National Film Development Corporation of India, also film and TV consultant to the Indian High Commission in London... WILLIAM FISHER has just completed a year as a Fulbright Fellow at the Munich Film and Television Academy... RICHARD HELLER is a freelance journalist, story analyst and screenwriter, currently political adviser to shadow Home Secretary Gerald Kaufman and formerly political adviser to Denis Healey... MARK NASH, a previous editor of *Screen*, now works as a freelance film producer and critic; he has just completed a short documentary series, *Acting Tapes*, for Channel 4... JERRY PALMER is a lecturer on film at the City of London Polytechnic and a freelance journalist... ROB ROHRER is a BBC producer based in Manchester... TOM STEMPER teaches film history and screenwriting at Los Angeles City College... JOHN STEWART is TV Access Officer at the BFI... SIR JOHN TERRY, lawyer and film consultant, was managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation from 1958 to 1978... JANET WATTS is a feature writer for the *Observer*... WANDA WERTENSTEIN lives in Warsaw and works for the Polish magazine *Kino*... ZHONG MING came to the UK in 1984. He is an artist working in oil painting and Chinese calligraphy, and has close links with colleagues in the Chinese theatre and cinema.

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Actors

SIR,—It's distressing to see a producer as bright and committed as Michael Fitzgerald respond so reflexively to Richard Trainor's question about the causes of 'blockbuster mentality' by blaming it on 'the never-ending spiral of escalating wages for some of the actors' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1984/85). Going out of his way to say 'I don't blame the managers and executives,' Mr Fitzgerald blames 'the Frankensteins', namely the actors. This contempt which some producers traditionally level at artists, going so far as to label themselves the 'creative element' while referring to actors and actresses as 'the talent' or 'faces', is endemic to Hollywood, and may explain why we produce so many shoddy, exploitative films.

As an actor who has done some eighteen feature films, a goodly number of which were independent, creatively financed films for which I received very little money, I would like to point out several things for Mr Fitzgerald's edification...

When the labours of an artist generate fifty or sixty or several hundreds of millions of dollars in profits, why is Mr Fitzgerald so aghast at the actor's insistence on participating in those profits? I have gambled on futures in every independent film I have done; accepting points and deferred salaries. It has not been actors, but the 'managers and executives' who control the creative book-keeping that insures that actors who do this never get paid. Perhaps the exorbitantly paid actors have learned the hard way that they never see future profits. Since actors (unlike the producer) are not in a position to pad or rob budgets, they demand their insurance up front.

In our market economy, value is directly proportionate to rarity and demand. There is only one Marlon Brando or Robert De Niro or Jack Nicholson and audiences want to see them and not substitutes. That is demand. The moment the ever-fickle audience changes its demands, the market value of that star plummets. Since a five-year career in our business may be a long one, one can hardly blame the artist for making hay while the sun shines.

I have yet to meet an artist that would not waive or diminish their fees to help a worthy project. If they don't, however, you may rest assured it is because they have been punished for doing so by some producer who has thrown the diminished salary in their face in their next negotiation.

Mr Fitzgerald overlooks the all too human factors of status in his

analysis. Many producers would rather make a fifty million dollar film with big stars that loses money than a two million dollar gem that makes six million because of the inherent status in the larger project. The small film is viewed as small time and gets second shift in terms of advertising and commitment, unless it accidentally turns into a mini-blockbuster, in which case it elevates the status of the participants.

Producers can exist hand-somely on development deals which never become films or, if they do, may add large hidden 'turnaround' costs to the budget, which further fuels the blockbuster mentality. The actor is paid only when he or she performs. It is only recently that they have received recompense when their performances are replicated electronically. A \$200,000 salary may 'outrage' Mr Fitzgerald, but after agents' fees and taxes it is \$80,000, and after hotel and living expenses on location it may be \$65 or \$70,000, admittedly a great deal of money, but if one understands that a bus driver in California may make \$30 to \$32,000 a year, that figure assumes a more reasonable perspective.

Yours faithfully,
PETER COYOTE
Mill Valley
California

Olive

SIR,—James Ivory's fascinating portrait of Vanessa Redgrave was sadly marred, in places, by its smugness. An example of this is his description of Ms Redgrave and a lot of other people (not 'Vanessa's army', since I suspect few knew or cared she was there) marching through wind and snow to protest against Ronald Reagan's Central American policies. Ismail Merchant, declining the offer to join the march, 'lay in a warm bed, drowsily watching a movie on tv.' 'This makes us sad,' James Ivory writes, but he's referring not to the complacency but the commitment. He then goes on to apostrophise Ms Redgrave as a 'brave, noble, wrong-headed being.'

Perhaps Messrs Ivory and Merchant know nothing of the tortures, massacres and 'disappearances' endemic in those Central American countries whose regimes are supported by the Reagan administration. Perhaps they simply feel it's none of their business. Whichever, the self-satisfied tone that James Ivory takes towards Vanessa Redgrave's action is certainly wrong-headed, but there's nothing brave or noble about it.

Yours faithfully,
GREGORY EVANS
Bath BA2 6AD

How like an angel

SIR,—It is a sad day indeed when the readers of an old-established film magazine such as SIGHT AND SOUND are moved to the venom displayed by Mr Peter Richards (Spring 1985), but sadder still when such criticisms are met with the foolish and vulgar condescension which your pseudonymous correspondent 'Heurtebise' offers by way of a reply.

But my main anger at Heurtebise's column lay in his stated preference for watching films on tv—an attitude which, let it be noted, he subtly alters in his reply, so that it appears he is merely criticising sloppy cinema managers. However, those who actually re-read his piece will find that he simply has contempt for cinemagoing.

Even if we allow that going to the pictures is not the fun it was, surely that is a matter for complaint, not complacency? If British Film Year is dedicated to getting us all back into the cinemas, then wouldn't it be a good idea to get the present system of showing films to the public reformed?

Certainly no real lover of the cinema could possibly prefer watching films on tv, with commercial breaks, surreptitious and unacknowledged re-editing, awkward scheduling and all the horrors of tv scanning. Directors as varied as Ford and Kurosawa, Demy and Altman, have had their visions truncated and dismembered by the tube. They didn't intend them for that medium. Watching films on tv may be better than nothing, but God help the art when people come to prefer second-best!

Yours faithfully,
P. GREENFIELD
Haverfordwest
Dyfed

SIR,—Anyone who claimed that he preferred to read the classics of world literature in the form of *Reader's Digest* condensations, or who claimed that the world's greatest symphonies were best heard played in an abridged form on a tin whistle, would be rightly regarded as a moron of incalculable philistinism.

I am sorry that Heurtebise should have had such singularly horrid experiences when venturing out to the cinema—I had no idea that West End press showings were so daunting. I suppose that's why they also lay on refreshments with the complimentary tickets—but even if I believed that these horrors were universally to be suffered by cinemagoers, I would regard it as something to be reformed, not used as a cheap excuse for watching the abridged, interrupted, discoloured and chopped-off-at-

the-sides entertainments which the tv companies pretend are feature films.

Of course there's a lot wrong with cinemagoing in Great Britain today. But I thought that British Film Year was keen to correct these problems, and I also thought that the British Film Institute (and therefore SIGHT AND SOUND) was in support of BFY, and indeed of both the cinema as an art form and the habit of cinemagoing. The Spring issue prompts me to think I was being overgenerous in this supposition, for it not only prints more smug garbage by Heurtebise, but Gilbert Adair's tedious April Fool's Day joke parodying Barthes. Isn't the real cinema stimulating enough for you? And if it isn't why don't you give up?

Yours faithfully,
PETER RICHARDS
Bridgend
Mid-Glamorganshire

SIR,—I read with interest, in SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1985, the claim by your latest gossip-merchant, the Francophile Heurtebise, that he is unwilling to take other critics to task—particularly by name—from behind his own veil of anonymity. Strange then that he should then go on to launch a brief, admittedly not at all venomous, offensive against comments I made in the tv Films pages of *Time Out's* Christmas issue concerning Charles Chaplin.

New insights into any artist's work are welcome. But the tone of Heurtebise's florid notes is distressingly superior, while he also seems to have a habit of contradicting his own intentions. For example, the 'now obligatory reference to Keaton' (I simply laid my cards on the table by admitting my love of Keaton's films) is apparently 'a bore'; and yet your vacillating writer then launches into a comparison of the two comedians. Worse, I am accused of being content with 'the mere exhalation of verbal heat rather than arguing a real point of view.' If Heurtebise had read the few sentences of mine concerning Chaplin with any real attempt to understand, he might have noticed that I explain exactly what I find so dissatisfying in the man's films. Does your writer expect the tv Films column of a weekly listing magazine to consist of exhaustive argument complete with esoteric references, footnotes, and close textual analysis?

More alarmingly, having castigated my lack of 'a real point of view', Heurtebise offers somewhat eccentric and, dare one say, downright silly, reasons for his appreciation of Chaplin's greatness. In his attempt to

Bernardo Bertolucci

By Robert Phillip Kolker

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elucidate his art for the benefit of unconverted heretics like myself in need of a 'tradesman's entrance' to understanding, Heurtebise proceeds with the 'argument' that Chaplin's greatness lies in his essential griminess. Dirt is his theme, 'a filmic configuration for which cinema has lost the formula.' We should understand that the tramp's underwear is dirty and smelly, and constitutes 'an immanent kind of off-screen space and may be regarded as a minor aesthetic parameter.' Minor indeed. Is this a joke, or a desperate effort to attain the dubious glory of being included in Pseud's Corner?

Finally, concerning Heurtebise's castigation of British critics for their lack of enthusiasm for a number of 'art movies' (many on his list, perhaps not surprisingly, French). I have no idea whose reviews other than his own he reads (the *Sun*, the *Mirror*?), but many did in fact receive fairly widespread support. If he does not believe me, might not he read *Time Out* more closely? Of the eighteen he lists as unjustly neglected, fifteen received highly favourable press from *Time Out*, and many were given extra support with interview material. Perhaps, before pronouncing from his lofty, safe

and invisible throne on the deficiencies of others, he might try to read his colleagues' words with a more exact understanding of the English (not French) language?

Yours faithfully,
GEOFF ANDREW
London W11

Blacklist

SIR,—For a study of blacklisted writers in the American cinema and television (1947-c.1968), I would appreciate hearing from anyone with information on Albert Bein, Henry Blankfort, Herman Boxer, Val Burton, George Corey, Lester Fuller, Margaret Gruen, Gordon Kahn, Hy Kraft, Charles Leonard, Henriette Martin, Josef Mischel, Arnold Perl, Louis Pollock, Robert L. Richards, David Victor Robison, Madeleine Ruthven, Reuben Ship, Ray E. Spencer, Paul Trivers, Michael H. Uris and Richard Weil. Major biographical facts, early career, unofficial or non-credited works for films and tv, pseudonyms and fronts would be the most sought-after information.

Yours faithfully,
MATTI SALO
Finnish Film Archive
PL 216 SF-00181
Helsinki 18 Finland

Flaherty

SIR,—To give some perspective to Brian Winston's review of *Robert Flaherty: A Biography* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1984/85), it might be worth considering the opinions of Flaherty's fellow film-makers.

'If I were to make a list of the most memorable and remarkable people I have known in forty-odd years of film-making the name of Robert Flaherty would certainly rank high on it. Quite simply, Flaherty was a great man, an original, a man of genius' (Michael Balcon). 'The greatest film directors provide us with a whole philosophy of cinema—a fresh vision which, glancing past all questions of skill and technique and even past success itself gives us an inspired insight of things. Of these Flaherty... the maestro has caught the eye of the gods' (John Grierson).

'He was a fabulous human

being and one of the greatest artists the cinema has produced' (Richard Leacock). 'Almost as in passing, he commented on the play of light on fields and woods and distant landscape, or on certain movements of horses or cattle, or even on the way a lane twisted between hedges... in those few days he enriched my understanding of looking at things and people in terms of movie in a way that ten million dollars would not buy' (Basil Wright). 'As a young man I had the good fortune to work as Robert Flaherty's assistant for a few months... those few months were perhaps the most formative in my life' (Fred Zinnemann).

It is possible that Balcon and Company were misled by Flaherty's bright blue eyes—but it seems very unlikely.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN TAYLOR
London W12

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *The NeverEnding Story*, *Mickey One*, *The Left Handed Gun*, *The Liberation of L. B. Jones*, *Remember My Name*, *The Boat*, *Steaming*.

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CINEGATE for *A King in New York*.

MAINLINE PICTURES for *Welcome to LA*.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *La Ville des Pirates*, photograph of the Metro Cinema.

PALACE PICTURES for *Paris, Texas*, *Insignificance*.

TARTAN FILMS for *Choose Me*.

VIRGIN FILMS for *The Brother from Another Planet*.

ENIGMA PRODUCTIONS for *Defence of the Realm*.

NO SURRENDER FILMS for *No Surrender*.

ICA PROJECTS for *Winter Kills*.

RCA VIDEODISC for *Swing Shift*.

LESTER JAMES PERIES PRODUCTIONS for *A Village in the Jungle*.

BAVARIA STUDIOS for photograph of Bavaria Studios.

DIRECTORS CO/KOKUSAR HOUET CO/ATG for *Crazy Family*.

MANFRED DURNIOK PRODUCTIONS/MAFILM/RF/ZDF for *Colonel Redl*.

SARA FILMS/JL G FILMS for *Detective*.

CIM PRODUCTION for *Dim Sun*.

FORUM (Sarajevo) for *Daddy's on a Business Trip*.

MK2 PRODUCTIONS for *Poulet au Vinaigre*.

SOVEXPORTFILM for *Can This Be Love?*, *A Strange Woman*, *A Time of Desire*, *The Last Night*, *The Communist*, *Berlin*, *Your Contemporary*, *Mashenka*, *Flyers*.

BBC TV for *The Private Life of the Ford Cortina*, *The Orson Welles Story*.

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ON NOW

●CHINESE BOXES

(Palace)
No 'city of magic' this time, Berlin figures in Chris Petit's drugs-and-espionage caper as a 'black hole' into which everything is in danger of disappearing. This includes plot and characters, since the former only exists as a game of 'join the lacunae' (as opposed to dots) and the latter as a series of homeless references: a Langian cop, an American innocent abroad, a Fassbinderish double-dealer. This is a stage further on from the stateless cinema Petit was moving towards in *Flight to Berlin*: a series of pirouettes on the brink of the abyss, desperate characters rendered even more desperate by the sense that they are about to be gobbled up by the 'nowhere' quality that is the film's *raison d'être*. (Will Patton, Robbie Coltrane, Gottfried John.)

●THE GREY FOX

(Palace)
Richard Farnsworth, roughrider, stuntman and, it is said, veteran of more than 300 features, was 62 when he made this spirited Western. He plays Bill Miner, a robber of stagecoaches whose 30 years in San Quentin have left him, it seems, serenely unruffled. Returning in 1901 to the chilly, beautiful Northwest, he tries a spell of oyster-picking, but soon reverts, none too efficiently, to a life of almost gentlemanly crime. His gunplay is deceptively slow. The Mounties in due course offer chase. Nothing exceptional in this, perhaps, except that it's rare to find a Western these days which does not feel bound to adopt an elegiac tone. The chief pleasure is in watching an old-timer (and although Farnsworth is in many ways a stripling, he has the carriage and mien of a true veteran cowboy) in a role which allows him to behave as though he is making his positively last appearance. (Jackie Burroughs; director, Phillip Borsos.)

●MRS SOFFEL

(UIP)
Gillian Armstrong's first feature since *My Brilliant Career* is based on a true story of turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh. The timid, highly respectable Mrs Soffel (Diane Keaton), wife of the pompous warden of the Allegheny county jail, falls in love with convicted murderer Ed Biddle (Mel Gibson), giving up family and social position to escape with him to Canada. Reworking the outlaw-couple-on-the-run theme, Armstrong treats Mrs Soffel's story as an act of rebellion against the suffocating society of middle-class Pittsburgh. The love affair is doomed, of course: the Biddle brothers are killed by a posse, and Mrs Soffel is captured and

returned to prison. That she has the strength to remain defiant, though condemned to an outcast's life, gives the tragic end a feminist twist. (Matthew Modine, Edward Herrmann.)

THE BAY BOY

(Rank)
Daniel Petrie's grittily unadorned but often humorous account of boyhood in a bleak Nova Scotia town in the 1930s has an emotional conviction which largely overrides its occasional melodramatic excess. (Liv Ullmann, Kiefer Sutherland.)

BIRDY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Or One Flew Over the Canary's Nest. This fable of adolescent escape (from life, war, and adult misunderstanding and stupidity) is a fey, fragile subject, and one that has the vaguely recessive flavour of 50s odes to growing up confused but honest. Alan Parker pumps pyrotechnics but no more meaning into William Wharton's facile novel. (Matthew Modine, Nicolas Cage.)

BODY DOUBLE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Brian De Palma used to imitate Hitchcock and Antonioni; now he seems to imitate his earlier imitations. *Body Double* is less a mix of *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*, more a re-creation of highlights from *Sisters*, *Obsession*, *Home Movies* and *Blow Out*. (Craig Wasson, Melanie Griffith, Gregg Henry.)

BROKEN MIRRORS

(Thorn EMI Classics)
Marleen Gorris' second feature is as controversial as her first, *A Question of Silence*. A sadistic kidnapper starves his female victim to death; intercut are scenes of the daily humiliation suffered by prostitutes in a brothel. Compelling, despite its troubling anti-male bias. (Lineke Rijxman, Henriette Tol, Edda Barends.)

CITY OF PIRATES

(The Other Cinema)
Raul Ruiz's fable of cannibalistic family games in a kingdom by the sea picks up the Surrealist thread from early Buñuel while giving full rein to its own visual outlandishness (shots from inside someone's mouth, etc). The occasional hint of other horrors (*Psycho*, *3 Women*) also suggests that the Surrealist today has a hard time making any headway against the everyday surrealism of the cinema. (Anne Alvaro, Melvil Fouquard, Hugues Ouester.)

FALLING IN LOVE

(UIP)
Meryl Streep and Robert De Niro commute between suburban Westchester and New York, falling in love, but never quite making it, on and between trains. This revamp of *Brief Encounter* seems oddly anachronistic, but is carried along by the star performances. (Harvey Keitel, Dianne Wiest; director, Ulu Grossbard.)

THE INNOCENT

(Curzon)
Echoes of the 1914-18 War reverberate in the depressed Yorkshire Dales of the 30s, as a boy, subject to fits and cast in the role of go-between, finds the world a place of cruel deceptions. Too carefully understated to land an effective emotional punch. (Tom Bell, Miranda Richardson; director, John MacKenzie.)

JOHNNY DANGEROUSLY

(Fox)
A fast and only a shade too furious spoof on prewar Hollywood gangster pictures: Michael Keaton, in the name part, has an authentic pre-*National Lampoon* innocence; Marilu Henner is a delectable torchsinger and Maureen Stapleton, Johnny's mum, the very spirit of bravely borne misfortune. (Director, Amy Heckerling.)

THE LITTLE DRUMMER GIRL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Like *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, this Le Carré thriller uses the heartlessness of international espionage to highlight a psychic predicament (from *Nowhere Man* there to *Hollow Woman* here). But the genre plot (as formal and ritualised as a Western) mixes uncomfortably with Middle Eastern realities, and neither Diane Keaton's performance nor George Roy Hill's bland, Bondish direction makes anything interesting or convincing of the drummer girl. (Klaus Kinski.)

MICKI + MAUDE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
To follow *The Man Who Loved Women*, a Blake Edwards comedy about a man who loves children so much that he finds himself married to two women. Some nicely escalating gags and slapstick in a rather 60s vein, but the film is too taken with the loveableness of Dudley Moore to have any sharpness as satire or a role-reversal comedy. (Amy Irving, Ann Reinking.)

MY FIRST WIFE

(Artificial Eye)
In this high-pitched but seductively modulated evocation of a marital break-up and its aftermath, Paul Cox ventures into the domain of psycho-drama without any loss of wit or compassion. Standards of playing set by his earlier movies are effortlessly maintained. (John Hargreaves, Wendy Hughes.)

NUMBER ONE

(Videoform)
Snookers shark Bob Geldof gets mixed up with crooked promoter Mel Smith, and rises from bedsit obscurity to televised fame. A disappointingly flabby pub yarn from writer G. F. Newman and director Les Blair, the team responsible for the excellent *Law and Order* series. (Alison Steadman, Phil Daniels, Ian Dury.)

OLD ENOUGH

(Connoisseur)
In her first picture, writer-director Marisa Silver (daughter of Joan Micklin) miraculously avoids the clichés in this formula story. Sarah Boyd and Rainbow Harvest, as the girls from opposite sides of the New York tracks who find friendship, are notably spontaneous: there's nothing of the upper-class young lady needing a healthy dose of proletarian commonsense; both actually do seem to need each other. Michael Ballhaus, cameraman for Fassbinder and Schlöndorff, provides the handsome visuals. (Neill Barry.)

PARKER

(Virgin)
After a promising start, with a bunch of German cowboys discovering Bryan Brown dazed in the woods, *Parker* winds down alarmingly, eschewing plot and character in favour of Brown's low-intensity obsessiveness. Jim Goddard's direction is less compelling than the average *Murder, Mystery, Suspense* TV movie. (Cherie Lunghi, Kurt Raab, Ingrid Pitt.)

PROTOCOL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Goldie Hawn Goes to Washington and steals Judy Holliday's role from *Born Yesterday*. Writer Buck Henry and director Herbert Ross lazily accommodate the star by ensuring that no supporting character or plot twist is allowed to come between her and the audience. (Chris Sarandon, Richard Romanus, Ed Begley Jr, Cliff DeYoung.)

STARMAN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
In reply to the invitation sent out with *Voyager II*, an alien arrives on Earth and generates himself into Jeff Bridges, a fidgety replica of Karen Allen's dead husband. Although the film has some charm as an SF version of *The Sugarland Express* (the ill-matched couple travels through a middle America of diners, freight cars, rednecks and oppressive policemen), John Carpenter manages to render it largely faceless. (Charles Martin Smith.)

STEAMING

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Joseph Losey's last film is an adaptation of Nell Dunn's first play, a strange and in the end rather frustrating combination. While Losey sketches some secret ceremonies within the confines of a condemned South London bath house, an all-female cast cuts up histrionically about life with and without men. (Vanessa Redgrave, Sarah Miles, Diana Dors.)

THE TIMES OF HARVEY MILK

(Contemporary)
Impressive documentary compilation on the short-lived political career of Harvey Milk, a gay activist whose pioneering work on San Francisco's board of supervisors was ended by an assassin's bullet. Self-effacingly direct in manner, powerful and troubling in effect. (Director, Robert Epstein.)

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